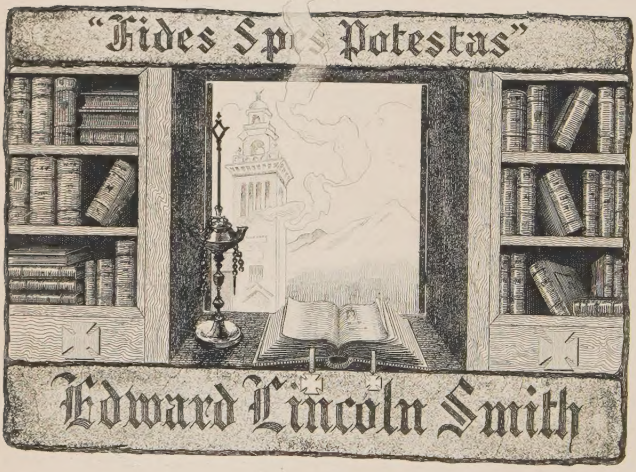

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BY

WILLIAM MALCOLM MACGREGOR, D.D.

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED FREE CHURCH, EDINBURGH

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TO

MY PEOPLE

IN TROON, GLASGOW, AND EDINBURGH

WHOM I HAVE TRIED TO SERVE

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(By the Publishers' permission, I am enabled to include a sermon—Jordan or Abanah? which appeared some years ago in *The Expository Times*.)

I.

GOD'S SHEEP ARE MEN.

"He will feed His flock like a shepherd."—Isa. xl. 11.

THIS promise was given to a people who had good cause for remembering the road it speaks of. It was only fifty years since, in utter misery, their fathers had been urged along it by their conquerors. They were beaten, which is always hard; they were leaving their country behind them with little prospect of ever seeing it again, and that makes a sad day for any man. And this was not merely a captive army which might go whilst the nation remained, the nation itself was being destroyed, the capital was in ruins, and the land ready to lapse back into waste. Thus through the months of journeying they had dragged themselves wearily on to meet a future without a promise. There is a passage in the older Isaiah which, in its description of a people crushed by God's judgment, sounds like an anticipation of this forlorn march: "They shall pass through the land hard bestead and hungry: and it shall come to pass, that when they are hungry they shall fret themselves, and shall curse their king and their God; and they shall turn their

face upwards and look down to the earth,—and behold distress and darkness and the gloom of anguish ; and into thick darkness they shall be driven away." Dr. George Adam Smith recalls Assyrian sculptures of the scene, how the captives were driven in gangs like negroes to the coast, or convicts to Siberia, pushed on by soldiers in the ranks, whilst the weak, who could not keep the pace, were tossed aside to die. An experience like that is burned into the memory of a nation, and after half a century the horror of it was undiminished ; so this promise was peculiarly cheering, as it spoke of a return under the most opposite conditions. The image of the shepherd suggests a leisured progress, where none is overdriven, and the feeblest rules the pace of all ; and their Shepherd is Jehovah, so that at every step they may look for the sheltering, provident kindness of Almighty God.

Such was the promise to ear and heart ; but how was it kept ? As to that, two reports might be given ; for though the journey home was not bitter and shameful like the journey out, it was yet anxious and laborious. Only a fraction of the exiles, and these the stronger, had even dared to attempt the road ; and when they reached their goal they bore the marks of hardship. Ezra tells of the qualms with which, in a later day, he led his party across the perilous waste : "I was ashamed to ask of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way, because we had said to the king that the hand of God is upon all them that seek Him." Self-respect

restrained him from asking for a guard, but nothing could conceal from him the terrible risks; and he would have been criminal if he had not striven, by labour and vigilance, to guard against them. Success attended both the marches, but some were ready afterwards to mock at the anticipations of these poets. They promised us a shepherding of God, easy, gentle, unanxious! And we scarcely slept at night; and we came to Jerusalem tired to death, a hungry and ragged company. But that is the way with poets; their gorgeous cloud-castles, when you climb up to them, are banks of blinding fog; the magnificent promise has in it only the poorest core of fact. That was one report, but there was another. "We were as men that dreamed," they sang, "the Lord hath done great things for us," for brave and good men have a magnanimous way of viewing their discomforts. It was God who gave us courage to attempt the road, and patience to endure, and fresh resource for each new danger. Without Him we never should have stirred, and without His care how could we have come through? If mean men sneered at the exposure of the hollowness of the promise, there were many also to praise God, with astonished hearts, because of His generous fulfilment of it; and they taught the promise to their children as a word which they had themselves found true, "He will feed His flock like a shepherd."

Such opposite reports of one experience are renewed in every age and society. In God's working the best things are not upon the surface. Our Lord said,

"*He that is of the truth* heareth My words," as if some preparation of heart were needful; and God's shepherding is never so obvious that men might be drawn to it by mere self-interest. It needs a big heart to do justice to the providence of God; and whilst the small nature cavils at the look of things, the great rejoices in a love which does not fail; and in the valley of the shadow, when every limb is racked with pain and every nerve is jarred, it still confesses God as Shepherd and as Friend. Even on that bitter road to exile, it was not man's ungentleness which made their utter misery, for if God had been in their thoughts they would have been above the brutalities of Assyrian soldiers. A French martyr, in the hands of his tormentors, was able to say, "My soul is like a garden full of shelter and of fountains." No malice of bad men bent on hurting him could enter there, nothing but the comfort of God's goodness. So with the devout of Ezra's company, there remained no grumbling for their tired limbs and sleepless, anxious nights, nothing but a cordial recognition of the sheltering care of God; and in every one who knows God truly, there is found something of this noble art which overlooks discomfort and discovers His presence even in the heart of distress.

1. In speaking of God's work in leading men, I should like first to dwell upon it as a task worthy of Himself. When we say, "He feeds His flock like a shepherd," we need, as in other poetry, to use

our common sense, for most of us have, at some time, suffered whilst idly ingenious preachers elaborated an image far beyond the point at which resemblance ceases. Nothing is more tempting for one's laziness than a figure of speech like this, for it is possible to drift along saying all kinds of pretty things about sheep and shepherds, and to get farther and farther away, with every sentence, from the realities of life. For it is not sheep that God cares for first, and a great deal which might be imagined as to a shepherd's work and way is out of all relation to the divine guidance of men. "Ye, My sheep, the sheep of My shepherding, are men," says Ezekiel; and the difference is enormous when that is borne in mind. Sheep are to us the very pattern of creatures without judgment or foresight, and the whole business of managing them proceeds on that footing. They must be thought for, and guarded against their own folly, whilst men are best led by practising them in leading themselves, and sometimes they can be finally delivered from folly only by being permitted to taste their folly to the end. Sheep are driven on unknowing, unasking, whilst men are forced, at every moment, to choose, decide, adventure for themselves; and if it were possible, over any lengthened period, to have the life of a community ruled as sheep are, you would have, in the end, not men but sheep—helpless, planless, characterless, a race destroyed. Sometimes an effort has been made to break away from this principle of life, and, as

in the Jesuit rule, to put one man absolutely in the hands of another, the passive instrument of his will, "perinde ut cadaver"; but such experiments have never worked for good. Both human nature and the thought of God the Shepherd are clean against them.

For He seeks not merely, as a shepherd does, to bring His flock to its destination with numbers undiminished, He aims at improving as well as preserving; and since responsibility and peril are instruments in human education, He will not have us escape from these. A man who says, I will be as a sheep, without will or thought, going as I am driven, without use of mind or foresight, is refusing the means by which God intends to make him a man. His plan is that we should see and choose and dare for ourselves. When we seem to be left alone, and have to act on our own instinct of what is right, He still is guiding; and the clearing of instinct, and the strengthening of character which come from such a discipline, are evidences of His care. He has brought us on by leaving us much to ourselves.

That is why I speak of the task as being worthy of God, for the greatness of the leader rises with the quality of those whom he leads. If God's government of men were a kindly absolutism, like a shepherd's with his flock—that is to say, if there were no mind and will but His, and we moved simply as moved by Him, the task would be a plain one; but then, how empty human life would be! So He

calls our minds and wills awake; "ye, My sheep, are men," He says. He works through our liberty, and uses our mistakes for our advancement. He counts it a lighter thing in us to err in the exercise of our judgment than not to judge at all. Languid natures are disposed to let things drift, and submit to the inevitable, for they do not want to take their life in hand and drive it towards some aim. The scientific talk of the day is much to their mind, with its suggestion that man is simply a part of nature, and cannot help himself. But that is not the message of Scripture. As Jowett says, "We should speak of conscience, duty, obligation, not of development and evolution; because we desire to strengthen that side of man which raises him above nature, not that which identifies him with it." And the real glory of God the Shepherd can only be seen when we do justice to our human liberty. An absolutist God would have nothing but a race of puppets, and thus He would be a little God; but our God is a great God, and His creatures are men; and the wisdom by which He guides them, in their liberty, is a wisdom that is inexhaustible.

2. And the way in which He leads is also worthy, though of that it is hard to speak aright. His love is not for a few, but there are few who fully know His love. In this chapter the image changes abruptly, and the man of war, making way by strength of hand, gives place to the shepherd with the lamb in his

arm. Many can appreciate the first image who know nothing of the second. Behind the infinitudes of space and the inexorableness of law, they have not found a tenderness which consoles. Many have come to recognise that they are not masters of their own fortune, but are being led where they did not mean to go, and set to tasks they never would have chosen for themselves. However high and sure a man's confidence may be at the outset, he learns that there is another strength against which his purposes are shattered. But that discovery of a superintending Power is a long way short of the knowledge of the Shepherd, "by which name, says Calvin, the prophet expresses God's immeasurable love to us"; and no one can be said rightly to know God until he has found in Him, not strength only, and wisdom, and foresight, but also kindness. We need them both, and this tenderly pastoral verse, coming between others which exhibit the irresistible power and majesty of God, is a lesson to the heart. We can pass, it seems, from thoughts of His power over to His love, and then back again, for the love of God lies embedded in the working of His power. When it is said, "He gathers the lambs with His arm," it is in the arms of His power that He gathers them; how sure and wonderful a place for a weak man to find his rest in! The sense of the vastness of God makes His condescension more overwhelming, when He cares for a man as if there were in the universe no other object of His care.

The love of God must never be thought of as a caprice; it is an infinitely strong thing, with as little of caprice in it as the procession of the stars. "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee"; for the kindness of God is the inner side of His strength.

Unless that is kept in view, we shall not understand the way in which God feeds His flock, for that has nothing of soft-heartedness in it. He does not guard them from strain and pain, He gives them the profit of these. "Thou feedest them with the bread of tears," says one poet, as if life might actually be nourished by suffering, so that a better manhood may remain after discipline. Our Lord Himself was made perfect for His high task through suffering, and by the same way the disciple must come to completeness.

3. But you must be a man to recognise it. "Christ feeds His people, says Cruden, by His word, grace, fulness, redemption, ordinances, providences," but no one of these can, of itself, make life stronger. We must stir up ourselves to meet them. The words of Scripture may simply encumber our memories, because we have not adventure of heart to lay hold upon them. There is an indolent and sulky habit of mind to which nothing seems right, just as there is a frank and eager attitude to which every new experience comes as a benediction.

And specially, we need to keep in mind the largeness of God's end for us. He is not content that we

should be as we are, but is leading us towards vast, distant things which might easily be set aside as unattainable; and experiences which are disproportioned to our present desires and expectations may very well be on the scale of His great purposes. The danger is of our missing the advantage of our discipline by cherishing hopes too narrow. A critic has said about some Socialist ideals, "The New Jerusalem may be fitted up, but these miners will never reach it. They will fight for the first small, stuffy, middle-class villa they meet on the way." Ah me! how aptly might the same judgment be passed on a multitude of Christian men, so soon content, so quickly tired of journeying, so impatient and resentful under the disciplines by which God is bringing them to better ends!

There is a verse of Scripture, dear to many hearts, which bears within it all that I have been saying: "The Lamb shall be their Shepherd, and shall lead them to the living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." That, in telling of the good end, tells also of the way, which is not without sorrow, for there are tears, and not without weariness, else would there be no need of fountains. With good heart, then, let us submit to His direction, sure that He sees to the end, and that what He allows is not without its meaning.

II.

THE LONG FEUD.

"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall strike at thy head, and thou shalt strike at his heel."—GEN. iii. 15.

THIS group of man and snake is a kind of hieroglyphic or picture-writing, which exhibits the moral situation in the world. It tells of a perpetual feud, carried on in age after age by always new combatants, in which the parties maintain their quarrel, each after his proper nature. The man strikes boldly and openly, and when his blow goes home the fight for the moment is done; but the beast, lurking and evasive, has its weapon also, which is scarcely less effective than the man's blunt strength. That warfare of "thy seed and her seed" engages every generation, and yet it is clearly a strife of lower and higher, in which the inferior thing gets victory at any time by a kind of accident. This ancient hieroglyph shows man in his essential nature, erect and kingly, and sin in its real character, degraded and earth-bound. It is far from containing all the truth of our moral life, but it does convey a substantial part of it;

and thus, as often we look upon it, we should be stirred by its message.

Let me, then, act as guide in the interpretation of this familiar symbol.

1. I would have you note how the attitude of sin is pictured. It is easy to imagine a sin which is not serpentine, but erect and defiant. In Milton's Satan there is a lordliness and magnificence of nature, though turned against God; and some of us have actually seen in men a spirit of insurrection, in which they have brought to the service of evil, qualities which are almost noble. But that is unwonted, and what is figured here is the commoner evil which has its root in appetite. It begins there, but it goes much farther, and out of the natural love of ease a whole world of evil may be developed. Indulgence may run out to excess which stupefies the soul. The desire for our own well-being may blind us to the rights of our neighbours. The pursuit of the means of comfort as the chiefest good may make us unscrupulous and false. The fear of losing our position may lead us to be cowardly and time-serving. In fact, there is scarcely any evil known amongst men which may not be traced back to an excessive tenderness of their own ease; and this might bear the name which Milton gave to Mammon, "the least erected spirit that fell from heaven." What Eve chose was not an evil thing but an inferior good, fruit not poison; and it is there that human evil most begins.

"The Interpreter," says Bunyan, "had them first

into a room where was a man who could look no way but downwards, with a muck rake in his hand. There stood also over his head one with a celestial crown in his hand, which he offered to give the man for his muck rake. But he did neither look up nor regard, but raked to himself the straws, and small sticks, and dust of the floor. Then said Christiana, I fancy I know somewhat of the meaning of this, for this is a figure of a man of this world." That is another artist's picture of the same situation, the life lived so exclusively, not for evils but for small and unworthy gains, that no room is left for higher thought. Bunyan, as an Englishman, had a touch of humorous pity for the scavenger who might have been a king, but the unsmiling Hebrew points straight at the despicableness of the life for sense. What we might incline to palliate, he brands under the figure of that degraded, writhing creature which moves in man an instinctive loathing. We are slow to take that from him. There are faults which we condemn with emphasis as being only evil, but others look so natural that there seems to be no wisdom in bearing heavily upon them. They are human nature; yes, but our nature surely contains more than these. It has love of comfort in it, and dislike to labour, and a preference for easy roads; but it has also courage, and love, and poetry, and faith. These, too, are natural; and in this city of our life there is no democratic equality, but an order and precedence in rank. Of many things which are natural, some are clearly meant to rule and some to

serve; and if the servile qualities take the lead, and man allows himself to be controlled by impulses which are inferior, then his life is no longer natural. In the deepest sense it is unnatural, it is even a mournful perversion of nature. One wholesome lesson of the great Stoics was that men should bear themselves with a certain loftiness, keeping clearly in mind the thought of why they are here. You are a son of God; He brought you out of the encompassing mystery and set you in this world, and you must not live as if you had no higher business than to take your ease and flatter all your senses. In this war of man and snake, you must not suffer the snake to prevail.

But whilst scorn has its place in our fight, there is also need of fear. The serpent is the creature of the dust, but, as Ruskin says, "it is the clothed power of the dust." "It is the strength of the base element which is so dreadful in the serpent; it is the very omnipotence of the earth. . . . Watch it when it moves slowly, with calm will and equal way—no contraction, no extension; one soundless, causeless march of sequent rings, a spectral procession of spotted dust. Startle it;—the winding stream will become a twisted arrow, the wave of poisoned life will lash through the grass like a cast lance. It scarcely breathes with its one lung; it is passive to the sun and shade, and is cold or hot like a stone; yet it can outclimb the monkey, outswim the fish, outleap the zebra, outwrestle the athlete, and crush the tiger. It is a divine hieroglyph

of the demoniac power of the earth—of the entire earthly nature. As the bird is the clothed power of the air, so this is the clothed power of the dust; as the bird is the symbol of the spirit of life, so this is of the grasp and sting of death." We have not learned the plainest meaning of the familiar symbol, if we have not learned that this is a formidable danger. Experience is ever warning us that no life is safe from the insinuation of a power with which we play. Every indulgence is avenged, and men and women about us are crippled in their progress because they did not watch. We are too ready to assert our own immunity from peril; and even when we talk of better men than ourselves who have yielded, it hardly strikes us that we also are in jeopardy. Half humorously we admit occasional failings, but as if they did not matter; whereas the warning of a great secular moralist (Bain) is that "if possible, you must never lose a battle," for the consequence remains. You feel that temptations on this side are almost ridiculously below you, and that only the most exceptional conditions could lead you astray to any serious extent; but the message of our text is that you are never safe until you have set your foot upon the serpent's head and crushed it to death. Certainly you are master by nature, only you must act as master, or you will come to be at the mercy of your own slave.

2. But look in our hieroglyph, at the image that is given of man; he is erect, and, if wounded, he is wounded only in the heel. "To man only did God

give a face turning upwards, to look at the heavens"; that is one lesson of the picture. To help men through this unending warfare, a reminder is given of their true nature as essentially kings in the world. When a boy comes out of childhood, the snare is set for him, the serpent is in the grass at his feet. At the very beginning of Scripture, amongst these childish records of the world's earliest days, the warning is written; you are a man, it says, so do not be taken off your guard. If you are erect and aware, the fight is in your hands. A man can take control of himself and live as God's son, with Satan under his feet; but only if he is awake and on defence. Hercules, the fabled deliverer of Greece, always wore on head and shoulders the skin of a lion killed in his first adventure, which Ruskin thus interprets: "Every man's Nemean lion waits for him somewhere. It is the first ugly and strong enemy that rises against us, and all future victory depends on victory over that. Kill it, and through the rest of life what once was dreadful is your armour, and you are clothed with that conquest for every other, and helmed with its crest of fortitude for ever more. Alas, we have most of us to walk bare-headed!" In childhood we learned the story of Eve and the serpent; but unfortunately we were not told, or we did not understand, that the seed of the woman is ourselves, that the fight is ours, and that this was written of old for our learning, to prepare us for the conflict.

The witness of the picture is clear, that man is

meant to be lord, and that he can only be degraded with his own consent. He may live on a level with the snake, as a creature of the dust, and some men do go on their belly all their days, their entire existence given up to mean things. Work from which others turn in disgust is their opportunity; the words and looks of those whom they have wronged have no terrors for them. But that degradation is of their own choice. Another kind of life was meant by God for them, and other paths were opened for their feet by Him when they were young. That man was not always the deformity that you see; and in his home, if you could see him, and sometimes at his prayers, hints are given of a wholly different being. For "God made man upright." Our one chance of overcoming is to bear in mind that sin, at no time, is to be taken as inevitable. We are fallen creatures, with an inheritance of evil within us, but we were made in the image of God, and He is able to make us prevail.

Even in the matter of the wounds received in this long battle, there is a hint of promise. Some interpreters, with an excess of prose, have insisted that a serpent's bite in the heel is as apt to be fatal as a bite anywhere else. But images are not to be so curiously investigated. When James says that the rust of rich men's gold will eat their flesh as fire, we do not thank a chemist for telling us that gold does not rust. The Apostle meant that the idle money, which is not kept bright in the service of human life, is perilous, and may indeed become a corrosive in the

character. And here the writer was not studying medical probabilities, and when he spoke of head and heel he intended an opposition, which is full of comfort. The war goes on in stroke and counter-stroke, and yet it is not an equal warfare. The curse is on the serpent, and the appointed enmity is not a curse, but a blessing to men. For, in decreeing this enmity, God set the soul of man on guard; and for man's encouragement, He said, "It can only strike at your heel, and if you stand erect the better part of life is out of its reach." If you come down to its level, it can destroy you; if you give up hoping, and trying, and praying, there can be nothing but disaster; but short of that, there is no wound without its remedy.

God means to teach us by this picture that we should bear ourselves bravely even in our ill success; for after we have failed, God's purpose abides, and He is able to save unto the uttermost. He has not put you at the serpent's mercy, but has set you above it, so that you can say, I have been hurt but not killed; I make little way in goodness, and my wounds are sore, but I can go on. When we sin, we are not to lie prostrate, lamenting and despairing, for that is the way to make the disaster final. And God says that while much is hurt through sin, hope has not left us, and the only thing which can keep us from attainment is despair about ourselves. Courage, then; you still may strike at his head, whilst he, at most, strikes at your heel. There is

nothing in the world more cheering than the spectacle of men who have erred deplorably, but who will not be hindered from trying again. They raise themselves up by faith in God's purpose and His promise. They believe in the forgiveness of sin; they believe that though they have made virtue harder, they have not made it impossible; and thus, with limping, painful effort, they follow on to know the Lord.

It was natural that believing men, in reading this great promise, should think of the Son of man who broke the power of evil in the world. We may allow, with Calvin, that no such definite thought was in the writer's mind; but when *God* appoints a conflict, there cannot but be the prospect of success. The writer, it is most likely, did not look to any particular descendant of Eve when he gave his picture of man, with sin at his foot, ready to be crushed; and yet that picture had to wait for its complete justification until One appeared who could say, "The Prince of this World cometh and hath nothing in Me," and who, when tempted by hunger, could answer, "Man shall not live by bread alone." That whole category of sin which comes from love of ease and love of self was dead for Him; He had really bruised the serpent's head. Other men have revealed, in their degree, the superiority of human nature, and have shamed us for our degradation of the word natural; for in them it has seemed natural to be kind, and generous, and patient. But our eyes go back to Him in whom was no sin, and who, by the power of His heart, has called our hearts awake.

In Jesus nothing was only for Himself, but everything was vicarious, and most of all His victory over sin. Not only did He fulfil the moral task of man, He makes it possible for us also to fulfil it. We might borrow for nobler uses Hazlitt's outburst in praise of his master Coleridge: "Oh thou, who didst lend me speech when I was dumb, to whom I owe it that I have not crept on my belly like the serpent all the days of my life!" To Him we owe it; for not only did He give us an example, He has given us a power and spirit of life; and hope and desire and resolve which were dead, have been quickened in us by His Spirit. By His victory He did not kill the power of appetite in men, but He opened the door of victory for all, and He helps men every step along the way they take. The beginning of our victory is in the faith that we are not condemned to a life among inferior things, but are really called by Him to eternal life. How we can possibly prevail we may not see; our faults are against us, our habits, our surroundings; but faithful is He who called us.

I suspect that many never come far because they do not honestly face that call. I have heard of two students engaging in free talk on many things in heaven and earth, and the one cast up this argument and that, which made faith difficult for him, until the other broke in with, "That is not your real reason; the fact is, you have not made up your mind for God." Christ Jesus speaks to those who halt in troubled

indecision, who wish, but who do not wish wholly. He stands as the security of a better life even for the weak; He lived it Himself, He has granted it to His saints, He makes it possible for us all. But only if we make up our minds; for the Lord Christ Himself can do nothing for a man who hangs back. It is written for our encouragement in this long feud, that "God will bruise Satan under our feet shortly"; but are we sure we wish to have Satan crushed? And the infinite power and goodness of God wait thus upon the human will, and according to his faith is it done to every man.

III.

THE HOUSE OF GOD.

"This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."—GEN. xxviii. 17.

I WISH to speak of the manner in which a house of God is founded, and is then built up and made hospitable for all men.

1. This story shows how a right beginning is made. A raw, cunning boy had been banished from home for his tricks, and he started out on foot across the hills to visit a distant uncle. He had walked until he was tired, and then he threw himself down on the bare hillside, as solitary a creature as the broad sky covered. But in his sleep he saw a ladder with God's angels mounting and descending, and the Lord Himself at the top of it, and words were spoken in his heart which made the future great. "And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Stories of a similar kind attach to many famous churches: a shepherd benighted on the hills has a vision of an angel, a king at his hunting runs upon a miraculous deliverance, a girl at the

village spring has her eyes opened to see. Architecture, and ritual, and music, and a gathered crowd, have so large a place in the ordinary conception of a house of God that they are often taken as essential, whilst really they are no more than accidents; for, in its essence, a house of God is any place at which He has revealed Himself to a man. That is the only consecration worth speaking of, and without that no church is worthy of the name. "This *place*," says Ruskin, "this moorland hollow, torrent-bitten, snow-blighted; this—any place where God lets down the ladder."

This suggests that, in its origin, the house of God is a solitary place. In religion there is a real infection of ardour, which may spread through the crowd like a running fire across a prairie. But the beginning is made in solitude, and at every later stage, if the work has any value, each soul will take a separate course; others may travel by the same road, but each is moved by his own decision, and is governed by experiences and discoveries which are as closely personal as if there were no other in the world but himself and God. One part of the profit of public worship consists in the freedom which it gives from interruption, and all true preachers have the gift of isolating men, and talking to them in the crowd heart to heart. For the house of God is, first and last, a place where the Lord discovers Himself to His friends in some other way than He does to the world.

And since God is in it, it follows that the house of

God is entirely independent of circumstances. Ezekiel, I think, intends more than a geographical note when he tells that it was "among the captives, by the river Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and he saw visions of God." For the profit of his dejected fellow-countrymen, who fancied that they could not worship God in exile, he declares that a heathen land, with all its corrupting and degrading influences, does not hinder; and in the records of God's hidden Church, it is written of ten thousand blessed places where glory seemed excluded, yet it came. In the spot where Jacob made discovery of God's house, everything was wanting but the essentials. He was making his way northwards, by the common track which leads through the high ground of Palestine; and when night fell he had lain down without ceremony, for on these hills there is little choice, and a tired man is not particular. "The track," says Dean Stanley, "winds through an uneven valley, covered, as with gravestones, by large sheets of bare rock, some of which stand up like the cromlechs of Druidical monuments." "There is little in these hills and valleys on which the imagination can fasten. Shiloh and Bethel almost escape notice in the maze of undistinguished hills which encompass them." Desolation is sometimes so vast and savage as to exalt the mind, but this is simply unhomelike; yet the imagination, working through the boy's dream, found in these unpromising materials the stuff out of which a vision could be made. The flat shelves of rock appeared as steps in a stairway up to God. About

him there had been outspread the huge emptiness of night. He was quite alone; driven from home, and doubtful what sort of welcome might await him in Haran, he fancied that no one cared what came to him except his mother; but there at his side he found angels, and in his ears resounded words from God. That was a noble transformation, earth at its earthliest giving place to what is high; a scene which left both heart and eye hungry becoming the starting-point for a vision of splendour.

I trust that, in your remembrance, you have scenes to match that. Some day you turned into a building, dingy and comfortless, with a few dull people scattered over the benches. The service had no features of attraction; the music was tuneless, the preaching without charm, and you resigned yourself to endure, until you saw a woman's lighted face. Clearly she was seeing what you, with all your better wit, had missed; she was not oppressed, as you were, by the sordid dulness of the scene, but, careless of the defects of the house made with hands, her soul was possessed with a sense of the splendour of the house not made with hands. For it is God's revelation which *makes* the house of God, and nothing else is of account. Huysman describes the congregation in a church in Paris: "Scattered through the church were widows and old women left without affection, and wives deserted or abused at home; they came with prayers that life might be a little kinder, that their husbands might drink less, and their children be kept from going

wrong, or that those who were ill at home might recover. No fragrance of flowers, but the lamentable perfume of gathered sorrow rose up there like incense. Few *men* came, still fewer young people, for they do not know enough of sorrow; but there were a few very old men, and some who could barely drag themselves forward from seat to seat; and one poor hunchback was always there, a man disinherited in the world, who felt that he could ask for love only from One who does not look on the outward appearance." That is a masterpiece of sombre description, and in scenes like these is the opportunity of God. In such a gathering it is only the outward sense which is denied enjoyment, for that company of tired and beaten folk is being refreshed with heaven's gifts of quiet, and comfort, and patience, and faith.

At a communion, in the silence, whilst the elders stand waiting, and the bread and the cup pass on from hand to hand, it is only the indolent who dwell on externals, for the kindled mind sees Jesus Christ Himself come with gifts to help His friends. If you are an outsider, you may call it tiresome, but thus you will declare your lack of understanding. For hearts are being fed there, and slow minds are lost in an amazed sense of the condescension of the Eternal Word. He who, upon the Cross, for our sins endured such bitterness, is giving Himself afresh to make life great. That is none other than the house of God! for still it is in God's working that the beginning of a house of God is made, and His presence cannot be

excluded even by the meanest surroundings. He who cannot worship except under conditions of human contrivance, has not rightly learned to worship at all. God must rear His own house, and we must learn to recognise where He is pointing the way. The solemn associations of a building, the crowd, the hush, the burst of music, the break and the entreaty of the preacher's voice may help our mood, and God makes use of all; but faith is not a storm of emotion, it is a personal meeting with the God of our life, and to that some of the things for which we ask may be a hindrance.

We need to magnify this first essential, for it is easy to cheat ourselves with a word, and to fancy that by its nature, and without effort of soul on our part, a church is a house of God, and that coming to it is a virtuous and godly act. For many it may be such, and they will never cross the threshold without some glad sense of anticipation. But for many it is as profane as the street corner; and thrills under the power of a preacher, and the contagion of a crowd, and the emotion of a touching hymn will not help the situation. It remains a profane place, of stone and timber merely; but when God reveals Himself, that aspect of it is forgotten, and all of which you have made complaint goes out of sight. It is for that we must seek diligently, remembering His own word, that those who seek shall find.

2. How the house is built up and made permanent. Did you ever consider the audacity of Jacob's phrase?

He did not reckon that this was a place at which he had *happened* to meet with God; he said, "This is the house of God," the place where He lives and where I may look for Him again. Like a child, he believed that the ladder stood at that spot not for one moment, but always, as if by nature. This, he imagined, is a place at which heaven and earth meet, and where angels are always passing up and down to maintain the communication between God and man; so, when he came back to Palestine, he turned with confidence to Bethel. In later days his descendants, if they had been challenged, might have said—God is everywhere; but commonly they were content to say of particular spots, God, most certainly, is here; and at these places they waited for Him. Remembering the marvel of His first coming, they had faith enough in His constancy to be sure that He would come again in ways like to the last. The grey morning returned for Jacob, and he rose for the day's tramp on to where fortune was bearing him; but never again could he see that hillside without some quickening of hope. God, surely, was there, and he always returned to Bethel with a mind prepared for great things. Are you as wise as he?

God, it is true, has more lessons than the one; there are many entrances into that upper kingdom of the spirit, varieties of experience and of teaching, coming all of them from a God who speaks in many parts and in many modes. But we are not, therefore, left to the mercy of accident. "God is everywhere,"

said Luther, "but He is also nowhere. He is where it is His will to be found." There are tracts of life and thought in which we may grope in vain for any certain revelation; and thus it is the worst of folly, if once we have seen God, not to magnify that opportunity, and return upon it again and again, to search what it contains for us. Every one who knows God at all has texts of his own, and memories, and insight of his own; and these are his ladder by which entrance is made possible into the world of truth and power above; and they are given that they may be used.

There is a travesty of that, for many people ask for nothing else than to have their own experiences recalled, and their own texts expounded. They would have preaching and worship travel always in one circle, and beyond what they first saw they will not go. But that is a caricature of religion. A ladder gives access to something broader than its own top; and when God has opened a way of entrance for us into His high world of truth, He means that we should always be drawing out of it fresh wealth for our own life. But that fulness as it comes will be interpreted by the old experiences. No learning will ever carry us away from these, but will rather show how just were the first obscure instincts of the soul in which we cast ourselves in faith on Him. Week by week, as we meet in His house, we should be looking for the new things which are on their way; and thus the church, consecrated by experience and by habit, will link us with a world of things beyond experience, and

we shall never pass its doors without some stirring of hope.

One thing further may be said. You may lay your account with it that your Bethel will not be a house of God to every one, your texts will not seem central and controlling to all men, your favourite book and preacher will not be admirable to all. And yet, you may also count upon it that what has come as a revelation of God to you will have something in it for other men as well. "He is the propitiation," said St. John, "not for our sins only, but also for the whole world." Some of us are much inclined to hold their faith apart from men as if it were an individual peculiarity, showing rather what they are than what God is. Now, if it is a revelation at all, that cannot be the case. The world is in sore need of God, and if you never commend to others what has made such difference to yourself, you may rob them of the best that life could give. "Whatever charge of folly," says Ruskin, "may attach to the man who says, There is no God, the folly is prouder, deeper, and less pardonable of him who says, There is no God but for me," and that is the suggestion of much of our silence and reserve.

For every man there are hindrances in the way of his finding God, and our business is to prepare His way by reducing these; and much of that is done by a vigorous congregational life. There are churches where one can scarcely pray, so inert and unconcerned are the people. Every minister knows that there are

churches where it is almost impossible to preach, so stolid are the faces. Nay, do we not read that He Himself could do no mighty works because of their unbelief? The sick folk went unhealed, not because the Lord was unwilling, but because their neighbours would not help. And in the languid church, where the stranger's heart is chilled before a word is spoken, how shall the people escape reproach? To any true church, each member should bring his contribution of attention, reverence, fervour, contrition, and thus the spirit even of the reluctant would be constrained, and the grace, which the few have known, would become the property of others also, who would be able, in their turn, to say: "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

IV.

THE MOTHER OF US ALL.

"His foundation is in the holy mountains. The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God!

"I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon as among her friends; behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia, each of these was born in Zion. Yea, Zion shall each one call mother! and the Most High Himself shall establish her.

"The Lord will count, when He writeth up the register of the people, that this one and that were born in Zion. With singing and with dancing shall men say, All the springs of my life are there!"—Ps. lxxxvii. 1–7.

HOW is a man to believe, and, in spite of facts which look the other way, to go on believing, in the unlimited expansion of the kingdom of God? We all have known the help which there is in the infection of a great assembly and the spell of eloquent speaking; these things carry us out of ourselves, and make us feel and desire more intensely than on other days. But the glow of feeling dies away, leaving us where we were; and the faith which cannot maintain itself in seasons of reaction is scarcely to be called faith at all.

In this Psalm we discover a man who has no

faculty of inflaming himself with big, resounding words, but is the very pattern of stint and difficulty in speech. His verses have no flow. He has no grace of embroidery, and when he has said a thing, he must leave it and go on to say the next, or else he says it again almost in the same terms. He moves amongst ideas, like a pioneer hacking his way through an untravelled forest; everything is ragged and abrupt, but everything means another step gained for the world of men coming after him. It is not a great style of literature, but it is an admirable style for speaking the truth. When words run, the thought and passion often lag behind; but in this pinched, and haggling, and impeded utterance there is not a syllable which does not mean more than it says. Nothing in the Old Testament has a wider outlook. In the whole Psalm, when it is rightly read, there is a curious, soaring quality, which makes Ewald call it "this most winged of Psalms"; but this loftiness and range mark the victory of a great faith over a singularly scanty furnishing of words.

That victory over words is a type of other victories which the poet had gained. As we can see from the nations which he names, he wrote when Assyria had gone down under the horizon, and when Babylon, a more tremendous oppressor, had risen into view; that is to say, he wrote in days of such penury and humiliation that it must have been hard to believe that the sordid huddle of makeshift buildings which

marked the site of Solomon's capital, could ever have a future. A prophet might speak large things of the city of God, but when the people turned back to find their homes, sight made the prophecy incredible. It is not for nothing that a man is a native of a particular land, has learned its story and shared its fortunes, has been sneered at by foreigners for its sake, and has rejoiced in its honour as for some personal advantage. There is something below or, perhaps, above reason in the patriotic feeling which makes a people defy disaster, and keeps them to the end believing that their land will still be great. And in this man that noble unreason accounts for much. Jerusalem to him could never be like any other city, where Abraham, in the dim foretime, had been stayed from the sacrifice of his son, where David had sat enthroned, and where, by God's own law, men were drawn to pray. It was a city by itself, not only the capital of his nation but the city of God, and the mere mention of that name lifted his thoughts into a magical world in which anything was possible. The city of God, the Omnipotent, who cannot know defeat—his heart grew great at that true word; and yet the whole delusion of rhetoric lies in the name, for a man may easily claim for the city what is only true of the God. Isaiah made that error, and imagined that, since Jerusalem was the hearth, the dwelling-place of God, it must be unassailable. Rome has made that error, and taken to itself Christ's promise that "the gates of hell shall not

prevail against it." The very word *Church* is full of peril. It means the Lord's house; and yet if we assume that the Church, since it is God's house, is bound to be right in the end, how great may be our error! So this singer makes a pause after the third verse, in order that he may not be swept away by mere rhetoric. "Glorious things," indeed, but how are they to be made credible? not by reciting some watchword as if it were a charm, or by naming a great name like the city of God. The city may be forgotten; a Church, once a true house of the living God, may be left desolate; but there is that below the city which is not subject to change.

1. In his abrupt, trenchant way, he says without any preface, "God's foundation is in the holy mountains," in which he makes a sudden cut at the inner fact. I believe, and I want to go on believing, these glorious things; but that is made possible not by looking at this squalid city of fact, nor by muttering some charm. My interest is not in what is seen, but in what is not seen; not in what is built upon the rock, but in the rock itself. Jerusalem stood on four hills connected with each other, two and two, in a sort of double spur, one of the natural, defensible sites of the old world; and the rock rising up from the surrounding valleys appealed to this man's imagination as a symbol of an underlying perpetuity. The city might grow rich again, and marble take the place of mud; the people might advance in wealth and consequence,

and the ruler's power might spread afar, but no such prosperity would help his assurance. These things might come and go; they are of the surface, whilst his interest lay below, in the rock. That is a difference of perpetual moment. "Glorious things are said of the city of God," and true things, but where am I to look for the security of them? Is the power of the Church to be attested by the pomp and wealth which it commands and the great names which can be quoted on its side? There is no Church which has always resisted the temptation to measure success by standards such as these, or to kindle enthusiasm in its members by essentially worldly appeals. My hope, says this man, is not in the look of things, whether that be encouraging or not, but in the reality of things; not in the city, but in the rock.

The contrast between Isaiah and Jeremiah in this matter is exceedingly instructive. Of course, a century lay between them, and in that time much of God's truth had been learned. But Isaiah, founding on the great idea that Jerusalem was God's hearth or fireside, maintained that it must always be inviolable. That assertion had an extraordinary confirmation given to it at the time of Sennacherib's invasion, and thus it became a part of the common stock of prophetic preaching; and when Jeremiah declared that the city was about to fall, he seemed not only to be no lover of his country, but to be an enemy of God's truth as well. Good men, who liked to say what had been said before, started out from

the thought of this inviolable city, and they looked for a hugely magnified Zion, spreading her political dominion from sea to sea. That was often couched in the language of piety and had a good sound, but, at bottom, it was not much else than what the French call "chauvinisme." Chauvinism is human nature; it is bred of a whirl of words, and lack of memory, and lack of imagination of the rights and the power of other nations, and self-importance. Every nation is big in its own eyes, and it sees no reason why its power should not be further advanced; and Isaiah's godly confidence, in a while, underwent that degradation amongst the false prophets. But Jeremiah, who searched more closely into the heart of things, did not concern himself with what was outward. He knew that physical force is a real fact, and that it was vain for Israel to hope to maintain itself in war or politics against the overwhelming might of Babylon. The city is doomed, he said; but the cause of God, the real Israel which outlasts defeat, of that there is no fear. The wonder of our God is seen not in keeping a city intact which has well deserved to fall. The victory which He has promised is not the setting up of a huge Jewish monarchy, pleasing to our pride as patriots, and it is not a whit endangered even by the destruction of Jerusalem.

Which do you believe in—the city or the foundation? the seen or the unseen? As Christian people you have learned to believe in a vast extension, some day, of the Church of Christ; but the question

remains as to the level on which you are looking for that. This poet, in effect, says that Zion is to prevail, and to be exalted as an unseen and spiritual force.

In another age, Jesus took up that question afresh and pushed it home. His attitude towards any force which was mainly physical was nothing less than contemptuous. To Pilate, armed with the omnipotence of Rome, He said, "Thou couldest have no power at all against Me." He felt that any man could make way for a while and win applause, if he would stoop for it; but He Himself refused to stoop, counting that a worshipping of Satan. The Kingdom of God, He said, is like the mustard seed, insignificant amongst visible things, but with interior forces which nothing can stay; it is like leaven, which a woman hid in her lump of dough, till the whole was leavened. In the Roman Church we find emphatic an anti-Christian element which exists in all Churches; for the same influences are everywhere at work, turning men's minds away from the power of truth to the solidity and sufficiency of visible organisation. "My kingdom," said Jesus, "is not of this world," and My victory comes by processes as silent as the working of leaven, as the dawning of light, as the gathering of "dew which tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men." There is no lesson so hard to learn as this—to believe in the power of Jesus Christ as a spiritual thing.

"His foundation is in the holy mountains," said this man, striking straight at essential fact. The

city might perish out of sight; Churches may come down, and no Church is indispensable to God; all visible institutions may be discredited. "But the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is the mother of us all," says Paul, alluding to the words of this Psalm; and there, at last, we see the promise disengaged from its corporeal part. The earthly city, the visible church, the time-honoured institution, has fallen off like a burst chrysalis, for the really potent thing is heavenly and unseen.

2. This thought of Zion as a power of religion in the world was the chief reason for this man's belief in her future; but it was helped by his magnanimous way of looking at men and of thinking about God.

(*a*) The witness which comes from many ages and lands is that the narrower the heart of a Church is, the less of hope it is able to cherish for the world. Dean Stanley tells how on Easter Day, when Russians meet each other with the glad greeting and response, "Christ is risen," "Yes, He is risen indeed," the older sect reply, "Our Christ is risen, but not yours." The history of Scotland is partly ridiculous and partly pitiful through the multitude of episodes of that sort. Congregations or sects in no way lose their self-importance as their membership declines; old jealousies assert themselves, suspicions of other people's loyalty or orthodoxy, and contentment with their own; and in that atmosphere there is no purifying of hearts. The old grudges live on, and feuds are remembered when the power to strike has long since passed away.

Now in that temper the triumph of the Kingdom of Christ is inconceivable. It is good to know God as our own God, and without that no worthy religion is possible; but no one will ever know God aright who thinks Him all his own. A Church must be generous in her judgments of other Churches in order to be hopefully missionary. Think what it meant, simply in the point of temper, to assert, as Isaiah does, "In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth; for that the Lord of Hosts hath blessed them, saying, Blessed be Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance"! The prophet does not grudge, even to the nations under whom Israel had groaned in bondage, a share in the friendship of God; and in such a mood it was easy to hope for the expansion of God's cause. In this Psalm each of the names mentioned might have awakened memories of old hate and of all that Israel had missed; Rahab—that glowing life of Egypt, rich in learning and in commerce, in art and war; the Philistines, who so doggedly had fought against the sons of light, and had left their mark on so many shameful pages of Jewish history; Tyre, the mistress of the farther seas, sitting at the gates of East and West, and gorgeous with the abundance of both; Babylon, which, from her summits of pride, had made the Hebrews know the depth of degradation and despair. Each name had its suggestion of intolerable wrong, and it would seem no more than natural if Israel had looked

to God to avenge them of their oppressors. But instead, so magnaminous is the temper of this poet, he looks to see them coming in along with Israel, citizens of equal right in the city of God. It is not wonderful that hope should prove triumphant in a heart so large and kind.

If our hope is to grow, we must seek for the increase of it in this quarter—in a kindlier judgment of those whom we dislike, and those who differ from us, and those whom we do not understand. They may be very perplexing and even absurd in their opinions, very limited in their outlook, very disorderly in their handling of tradition. I wonder how many of us could endure the strain to which this man's magnanimity was subjected, when he wrote, "And Zion shall each one call mother; yea, each one was born of her." All our unmannerly and selfish instincts would incline us to snarl out, "Our mother, not yours." But one power by which faith in the world's future is maintained, is this continual sacrifice of jealousies and narrowness of heart.

(*b*) And just as needful is a large and generous thought of God, which this man also had. Many in Israel were willing to look for a day when every one would think as they did, and come in as learners and clients in their school. That is a form of expectation which calls for little piety, for it is easy to be a zealot for one's own opinion. Many people in the Church of Jesus have no other expectation and no other plan of converting the world than by bringing

men to their own peculiar way of thinking. Their dream is of a gigantic, world-wide Roman, or Anglican, or Presbyterian Church. That may not find expression in words, but it makes itself felt in their plans of work. Conversion, as understood by them, is not simply conversion to Christ, but to Christ as He is conceived in a particular school; and such a notion makes the conversion of the world inconceivable, and, I might add, it makes it a doubtfully desirable thing. A Church may be rightly persuaded that it knows something of the truth of God, but no Church knows all the truth; and a world-wide extension of one set of articles of faith would be an enormous calamity. Paul's prayer was that "through the Church there might be known the many-coloured wisdom of God." The world is big, and all its nations have character and peculiarity of their own. Hearts do not everywhere beat in the same measure; and passion, and judgment, and the creative imagination exist in ever varying degrees; so it cannot but be true that new discoveries will continually be made of the depth and fulness of the thoughts of the Almighty. A Scottish dissenter of the eighteenth century laid down the daring proposition that "none have Christ's image who have not just our image," which, in a kind of parody, exposes the temper of many earnest people. They hold to a God terribly difficult to believe in, a God who scruples over points of form and constitution; and that is a God who is little likely to prevail in the wide world of men.

This man had made a nobler thought his own. He saw that his way was not the only way, and that the true Zion in which God delights was not the little, parochial Zion of Josiah, and Hezekiah, and Asa; it was a Zion in which even Rahab, the superb, would be proud to have a place,—a Zion with room within it for many differences, a Church very lightsome and very large. Strangers, coming to God, were not to come in on any terms of inferiority, to enjoy bare rights of toleration. Their place must be as sure as ours, their right as clear —a right of birth, not of favour or of patronage. In a very beautiful way, the poet makes entrance easy for the stranger, for it is not any officer of Israel who keeps the roll of citizens; it is God Himself who writes up the people, and who rejoices as He notes that strangers have now the privileges of sons. In our narrowness we might be sour in our welcome, imposing conditions and tests which would humiliate; but he who enters does so not by our permission, or on satisfying tests of our contriving, it is God who greets in him another son come home. "The Lord shall count, when He writeth up the people, that this one was born in Zion." And those who thus receive God's welcome are glad at heart. "With singing and dancing," says the poet, they declare that they find all that their thirsting nature needs in God.

Faith in the extension of God's kingdom is renewed by influences like these. Men are not left

to be tossed on the tide of experience, at the mercy of every change of circumstance. They know Whom they have believed; they know the power of the spiritual things, and thus they are ever of good cheer.

V.

THE GOOD INHERITANCE.

"God, whom I serve from my forefathers in a pure conscience." "The unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also."—2 Tim. i. 3 and 5.

SOME time ago a great Scottish administrator complained of the educational difficulty which was arising out of the decline of parental authority. In cases of persistent truantry, the constant answer is that "we have no control over the children," that "they will not listen to what we say"; and the plea is urged as if it made an end of blame. In many cases a widowed mother or father has to work all day away from home, and in such conditions it is easy for the children to run wild. But the speaker had in view the much larger class of cases in which the parents, without an effort to restrain them, allow their children to do as they will. It was suggested that ministers should preach more on the responsibility of parents, and I should be glad to think that the words of preachers as to practical affairs could provide a remedy; but the gravity of the mischief is such that efforts in many

directions must be exerted in order to cope with it. The whole world is ruled by law, and it is a necessity of healthy existence that intelligent creatures also should grow in a smaller world of law, where, as Ruskin said of his own home, nothing is promised that is not to be given, and nothing is threatened that is not meant to be inflicted, and nothing is required that must not imperatively be done. It was said of Abraham, "I have marked him out to the end that he may *command* his children after him that they may keep My way," and the saying must have sounded uncomfortably in the ears of many. "We must make up our minds," said Mrs. Booth, "that our children shall not be wicked"; but the misery of to-day is that, in so many cases, it is left to the children to make up their minds, while father and mother look helplessly on. There are mysteries in human character, and sometimes after real care and patience, there are outburstings of passion which baffle all a mother's hope. Temptations, against which nothing could guard, lay hold of some element in a boy's inheritance, and carry him away; but even then the case may not be lost. George Meredith, in one place, says very nobly, "My boy, if he fall, will fall from an actual region of purity. He dare not be a sceptic as to that. Whatever his darkness, he will have the guiding light of a memory behind him; so much is secure." "He will command his children that they may keep My way."

To some people most of what can be said in this

direction is commonplace, and to others it seems too high for practice; but I should like to settle your attention on these admonitory examples of the inheritance of character and of faith which made both Paul and Timothy so rich.

1. Of character. Paul says, "I serve God from my forefathers in a pure conscience"; and the phrase, though it is novel, need offer no perplexity to a serious mind. "I can see my dear father's life," says Carlyle, "in some measure as the sunk pillar on which mine was to rise, and to be built. I seem to myself only the continuation and second volume of my father." With grave humility some of us would like to bear the same witness of themselves. Our interests and our rule of life, in so far as these are noble, whatever of reverence or purity or of public sense is in us, we trace beyond ourselves. No other descent than this is honourable, and we pray for grace to hand on the same inheritance so that our children may not find the custom broken, and go astray to serve evil from their fathers. For that, also, is a possibility, and men who have been in their graves for a generation are sinning on and on to-day, in the lives of sons whom they moulded in their own likeness.

It is a lawful curiosity which leads us to inquire into the sources of a great life. The greatness is of God, and of it we can render no account. But circumstances can fan or damp the fire, making its light steady and intense, or flickering and smoky; and we might cheerfully part with a great deal of unpro-

fitable knowledge if we could see into the home at Tarsus, and learn the methods by which his parents captured that eager spirit, and turned all his ardour in the one direction. It was their doing; and at the very end of life, when for years he had been under Christ's own teaching, Paul still bore witness that he had simply carried forward the good service of his fathers. They taught me, he confesses; theirs are my habits; they made me strict, and pure, and upright; and they gave me a standard of what is great and what is small in life. That is a noble testimony to men unknown.

We are apt, in the light of a clearer day, to forget that Judaism was a divine faith, and that Paul had learned it at its best. There was nothing worldly or ambitious in his devotion to that religion. He was on the way to high place when Christ laid hold of him, for a man of such size and impetus of nature could not but be first; but a mere self-seeker does not bring that blazing passion to his work. He uses the fanaticism of others, and waits his chance. But Paul's was a pure fire, and when many of the ruling class were worldly and grasping, his hands were clean; and that zeal for God and that purity of character find their explanation in the devout home, in the dim ghetto at Tarsus, where the father had refused for his son the opportunities which a great university and a wealthy commercial city might afford, and sent him to Jerusalem to be the servant of God's people and the interpreter of His law. "Am not I

also the humble James Carlyle's work? I owe him much more than existence. . . . It was he who determined on educating me, and who from his hard-earned funds sent me to school and college, and made me whatever I am, or may become. Let me not mourn for my father, let me do worthily of him; so shall he live even here in me, and his worth shall plant itself honourably forth into new generations." It was in Tarsus that Paul learned his Old Testament, and thus the foundation was laid of his conviction that Jesus was the Christ of God. "I serve God," he says, "from my forefathers."

It is worthy of remark that this service holds through such immense change of circumstance. The father was, probably, a plain man, with interests necessarily practical, and the son was sent to a school which had drunk too deep of theory, and afterwards he turned to his wandering preacher's life. The father rising day by day to his unvarying task, and the son passing like a courier through changes and chances of every sort, in a work so purely spiritual,—what was there in common to the two lives? Not even one religious form, but "all service counts the same with God." "Let me write my books," says Carlyle, "as he built his houses, and walk as blamelessly through this shadow world." The real service of God continues through every change of habit and of place. It is to put heart and truth into what we do; it is diligence and fairness; it is doing justly, and loving mercy, and walking humbly wifh God; and

that was what Paul had learned,—diligence, uprightness, chastity, reverence. There is no divine service without these.

But how are such effects to be secured? You may rear your son in simple imitation of yourself, sending him to the same school and the same profession, and leading him by measured stages along the way which you yourself have taken. That looks easy, but you know that it does not always work. For one thing, your son is not just you over again, and the world in which he is growing is not the world on which you looked out through your father's windows. The whole temper of society has changed, and many of the old restraints have lost their hold. Even when your son is with you, there is difficulty; but when he goes away, where the good customs of home are no longer about him! In his new surroundings, a frankly religious man is almost unknown. Where he is, people do not go to church, and perhaps they have no church to go to; how can your influence hold him, so that in that changed world he may go on serving God? It is impossible to lay down rules, because there is a clear element of contradictoriness in human nature. Many go wrong who had every chance of doing well, whilst others, in a strong reaction against the evil they have seen, have turned to better ways. But, broadly, it must be said that the issue will depend on the depth and the sincerity of the impression which you can make. It is not by calling in some good man

to talk to your boy for half an hour that you need hope to fix him in good ways. If religion is a matter of polite habit to you, it will be a feebler habit in your children, which is likely to break up at any change of circumstance. If you find no interest in church, and catch at any excuse for staying away, your children, in a while, will not go to church. If you are more concerned about your daughter's new dress than about her prayers, if you accustom her to judge of people by their clothes or their connections, you must not wonder if she grows up frivolous and heartless. If you will not yourself talk to her about Christ, you need not count the teacher inefficient who has failed to catch her interest. The fact is that, with all the might of your laziness and worldliness, you have been teaching her to count the nobler things incredible. If your standard is simply that of your neighbours, you must not complain if your son also follows his neighbours. What most is needed is energy and sincerity; "we must make up our minds to it," as Mrs. Booth said. We must be religious ourselves, if religion is to have any hold on them. Better the most stammering prayer from the father of the house than that any day should pass without the reminder that God is Lord of all the days. Let your children feel that falsehood or uncleanness is odious to you, and their love will come to the help of conscience. Other way than this there is none. Paul's father was twice a father, and we may have the same honour. It

is good to leave your son an honourable station, but it is surely better to leave him a character moulded into the forms of sobriety, and thoroughness, and unselfishness. To a man who had these our Master said, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God"; and a boy rightly schooled at home is often brought not only near to the kingdom, he may unconsciously grow up into the kingdom, for God's Spirit works in homely ways of patient training.

"We scarcely ever," says Ruskin, "in our study of education, ask this most essential of all questions about a man—What *patience* had his mother or his sister with him?" There is abundant goodwill and desire that children should turn out well; but patience and sincerity and godliness are harder words, and it is to these that the reward is assured.

2. Of faith. This is perhaps a rarer inheritance than the other. Some one has called trustworthiness "a capitalised form of divine grace," and it does look as if, in some stocks, integrity were in the blood, for there is not a black sheep in generations of them. But faith is far less constant. In serious homes there are sons with many virtues and many charms, but the religious instinct is asleep; they are clean, upright, ungodly gentlemen, and every effort to arouse them seems in vain. To train, suggest, exemplify—this is clearly possible, but "the wind bloweth where it listeth," and it will not come at call.

Nothing is more perplexing than the alternate openness and callousness of a child. There is the

wide gaze of wonder, which makes you feel that your child is nearer heaven than you are. He asks questions which make you wince, and says, at his play, things which set you wondering. He seems of kin to the pure world of spirit. But that phase passes in an hour, and you find a creature almost painfully matter of fact, who is exhilarated by a new sense of dignity at his father's funeral, and whose humour expresses itself in noisy practical jokes; where is now the kinship with the heavenly things? And remember, through all the changing phases, a child's soul is the most delicate of organisms, in which any rough handling may work quick havoc. There is some evangelistic work amongst children from which one turns away his face, and hopes that it will be kept by God from doing all the mischief which it threatens, for both method and appeal are so wrong. A child is not meant to have the same experiences in religion as his father; he thinks as a child and feels as a child, and much that is done engenders nothing else than insincerity.

The great fact is that a child's world is crammed full of *things*. Every day he comes upon objects which he never saw before. He goes twenty miles with you in a train, and stumbles off the platform into a wonderful new world of adventure. The objects of sense press in upon him clamorously, and they are all real; they can be touched, and looked at, and played with. But religion, as presented to him, is so much made up of words, that you need not wonder if he is little

interested. God's way of dealing with redemption is a lesson to us here; for men were occupied also with things which eye could see and hand could touch —real things, as they thought, and the world was so full of these that it seemed a waste of time to look beyond them. So alongside of the charms of this amazing earth God placed a beauty of another kind; "the Word was made flesh," and men, who had the gift of understanding, saw it then. The record of Israel is full of stories of how God's grace and patience and victorious righteousness discovered themselves in events. Every saint, taught and fashioned by God, was a new word in flesh; and Jesus, crowning the work, was the embodied expression of the redeeming thought of God. That grace divine was lodged within the world as one of the things which could be touched, and whose effects were visible, and men who could not believe without seeing were mastered at last.

That is a lesson in religious education. A boy or girl is awaking to the bigness and goodness of the world.

> "The world is so full of a number of things,
> We all ought to be as happy as kings."

God, at the first, declared it very good, and it is right that a boy's heart should be captured by the sense of how good it is. Simply to live, to run about, to laugh, to look, to handle the strange things which every tide throws up, that makes a joy of itself, and

it is all in real things. God intends the man to be a citizen of the world, and He expects the boy to learn what kind of place the world is. Well, you tell him of higher things, and he shuffles on his seat and gapes; he hurries through to get done. The Psalms are lessons, not lights from the central light of God; the glory of Christ's death is something to be learned, and so it is more or less a burden. How are you to change that? Do not be cast down if it does not at once change as entirely as you would like, for a child must think and feel as a child. But the sure way in which these things can enter the heart is by the word becoming flesh, by that teaching becoming real, an object to be talked about and wondered at. What is the use of teaching them to pray, if they nowhere see the effects of prayer in strength and quiet? What is the use of saying that holiness is desirable, if they never see good people who attract them? Why teach them that with God is fulness of joy, unless you can show that God is making you glad? I do not say that such teaching will invariably find success, and yet it would be hard to exaggerate what is gained when religion becomes one of the realities of human life. For just as David, in the dust of war, remembered the water which revived him in his boyish games at Bethlehem, will your son, in the hurry of secular life, cast back his heart to the good he knew at home. It is not a little thing when you have lodged some image of virtue as one of the impressions of childhood, for when you are in your grave

that may draw back your son from the far country. It is vain for him to make display of sceptical opinions, for his heart knows better. He knows that God was in his home as really as father and mother, not as a word, or an object of superstitious fear, but an animating and sustaining presence. God help us so to live that our children may follow in God's service, and that the faith which is in us may be much more in them.

One thing let me add. We must not approach this task anxiously, for God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness. There are helps to bear us out, and the word is good seed, which beareth fruit of itself. Believe in the word of God, and do nothing to hinder its growth; do not labour through the week to make your daughter a slave of fashion and convention, hoping that Sunday will make her a servant of the Lord Jesus, for that is not reason. But if you give the seed a chance, you may take for your comfort the old saying that "he who goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." For God, who sent the children to your home, that you should make yourself in trying to fashion them aright, had in view for you the joy of those who, at the last, can say, "Behold I and the children whom God hath given me."

VI.

REAL THINGS AND FOR NOTHING.

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money on that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.—Isa. lv. 1, 2.

THE world in which men buy and sell is possessed by two miseries. There is the misery of the man who, because of his empty pockets, has to consent to go without the object of his vehement longing. We smile when we see children staring with greedy eyes at the heaped treasures of a toy-shop window. But that vain longing is not always childish. It may be a very sore pain, as when a boy, with high and clean ambitions, has the yoke of some sordid occupation bound upon his shoulders, because his parents cannot afford to let him wait and study; sometimes it rises to the level of pure tragedy, when a woman is told that her child might live if a certain treatment could be followed. If only she had a little money, what a fortunate neighbour flings away without a

thought, all her future would be different, for she would have her child! And it cannot be. But there is also the misery of the man who discovers that his money, with all its power, cannot win for him the thing he most deeply desires. Something it can do; some show of satisfaction it can give, but not always satisfaction itself.

> "Gold and iron are good
> To buy iron and gold:
> All earth's fleece and food
> For their like are sold,"

says Emerson. There is a sort of barter, it seems, all round the world, and the price and the purchase are somehow on a level. Money can only purchase money's worth; and many a rich man has painfully discovered that what he stands in need of is not within the compass of any wealth.

These two miseries and God's answer to them meet us in this passage. To the first, the prophet declares that *God's gift is free*; and to the second, in contrast with the disappointment of that which is not bread, he declares that *God's gift is real.* And I propose to speak of these in the reverse order.

1. God's gift is real. Every one who thinks at all is aware of the temptation to exaggerate what money can do. Men gaze enviously at their fellows, as if possession and enjoyment went together, though the rich man, on his side, recalls sometimes with envy the happy irresponsibility of the days when he was a boy without a sixpence. Of course, he now can go any-

where and see anything, but care goes with him, dulling his enjoyment of all he sees. He is not a free man, but mastered and possessed by his own possessions; and the question often wakens—Is this which I have purchased bread or only a show of bread? I have paid for it as if it were clear gain, with toil and hardness which are real. But there is something mocking and elusive in it; it looks like substance, but it has not the effect of substance. "As when a hungry man dreameth, and behold he eateth, but he awakes and his soul is empty."

A philosopher would say that this is not surprising, for all the things we look at are of such stuff as dreams are made of, and spirit needs spirit to sustain it. This world on which we walk about is yet, in its build and make, a spiritual thing, and what gives value to anything upon the world is that more than earth is in it. Sun and moon are glorious in their stations, and they lift our hearts with admiration; but suppose there were no mind to observe and admire, what would their glory be? A stream of vibrations "from things unseen to things unseeing," unmarked and unenjoyed. It is the mind that makes the splendour, God's mind speaking to our minds. As soon as there was a mind to perceive, and only when there was the change of "that blind vibration into the glory of the sun and moon." We ourselves are of mingled earth and air, dust of the ground and breath of God; and the continual delusion of money is that, in ministering to one part of our nature, it can minister to

both. "Gold and iron are good to buy iron and gold." It buys on its own level. Dr. George Adam Smith, recalling the fact that these chapters were written for exiles, says, "Of all men, exiles can least forget that there is that which money can never buy. Money and his work can do much for the banished man; they can feed him, clothe him, they can even make for him a second home, and, in time, a kind of second citizenship. But they can never bring him to the true climate of his heart, nor win for him his real life." Men ask for food, for shelter, for work, but really they ask for greater things than these, since care and strife may poison their food, and mean thoughts make work a drudgery. Jesus, who knew how men are made, marks in the service of Communion His sense of the proportion of our nature. He gives a crumb of bread—so much for the body; and He gives Himself, an immeasurable boon which glorifies the whole of life—and that is for the soul. No wonder that money fails! "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is," said the Wise Man; the smallest gift is enough, if only the heart be content.

I suppose that, in the prophet's day as in our own, people of his kind were looked at with impatience by their fellows, as dreamers of dreams and architects of air-castles. We came here, said some, as poor as any of you; but we accepted the situation, and threw ourselves into the larger life of this Empire, and now we have left that sordid narrowness behind. All doors fly open at our coming: in every pleasure and pageant

we can have a part, and we are willing to make your fortune with our own. But is it fortune? You are spending money and labour on that which is not bread. You say I am a dreamer of dreams, with this talk of pardon, restoration, God; at least, my dreams give me peace. I am a poor man, with no material prospects whatever, but then this life of mine has brought me all that heart desires. If you cannot say as much, it looks as if the delusion were on your side, as if your possessions were of unsubstantial quality. I have a Friend who, hour by hour, in token of His mindfulness, is sending messages of cheer and help to me, and who gives me hope of better things when earth has failed me; has your success brought to you a Friend like that? The young ruler whom Jesus called to give up everything, was faced with such a choice: to lead him to refusal were the familiar considerations of the people he had grown up with and mixed with every day, his place in society, his reputation for common sense, the very real pleasure of possession, the habit of comfort and of luxury; and on the other side were "these walks with Jesus across the fields," the sharing of His mind, the assurance of His friendship, an intimacy in life and in death. I suppose that men will always be divided in their opinion as to things like these, for some will promptly pronounce as alone real the advantages which money secures, and others will choose the more ethereal things. Which is bread, asks the prophet? This, which money certainly can procure, though it leaves

the heart hungry? or the other, which, admitting hunger and privation, yet makes the heart content? "He that drinketh of this water," said Jesus, "shall thirst again; but he that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst"; and money is useless in purchasing that.

2. And it is free. Some of you would gladly be content at heart, but you hesitate about the price. You have many cares and worries, and frequent disappointments, for life has not given to you all that it promised. You look with noble envy at the face of your neighbour, so tranquil, so sunny; you are quite sure that he has learned a secret hid from you, and you wish you might be a sharer. But you have not the coin which passes current in that blessed land.

I wish it were possible to use words which are not utterly jaded and familiar in proclaiming the prophet's message that God's gift is free, for what makes care perpetual is that men refuse to receive life from God as a gift. They have heard so often this free offer of life and salvation that they are tired and incredulous. If the prophet asked some great thing, they would do it, but this proposal has a look of meanness which moves their distrust. "Is this the mighty ocean? cried a man when he first came in sight of it; is this all? Yes, all; but how small a part of it do your eyes survey? Only trust yourself to it; sail abroad over it, and you will find that it will carry you round the world. It has no end."

If you think of it, it is not only grace which is free,

but all earth's finest things. Love itself has no price, or friendship with its steadfast loyalty, or the chivalrous defence of the weak. In fact, wherever a man helps his fellow on the great scale, the thought of payment becomes irrelevant, and we have simply to bend our pride to receive; or, if we offer anything, it is not as an equivalent, but, at best, as a faint token that we have recognised. But though we know that, the habit of a commercial civilisation has taken hold of us, with its rude standard of a price for everything, and we are incredulous and a little suspicious of whatever is said to cost nothing. George Gissing speaks of a time in his poverty when, on a long walk, he gathered brambles and ate them as he went, and only when he came in sight of an inn did he realise that his hunger was satisfied. And he adds, "A sort of bewilderment came upon me; could it be that I had eaten, and eaten sufficiently, *without paying*? At that time, my ceaseless preoccupation was how to obtain money to keep myself alive. But here Nature had given me a feast which seemed delicious, and I had eaten all I wanted. The wonder held me for a long time, and to this day I can recall it and understand it." In a pictorial way, that describes the cravenness of our attitude to God. Our life has prepared us so badly for doing justice to His liberality; we have lived at so sordid a level with one another, that it seems incredible that there should anywhere be satisfaction, and for nothing.

And yet Jesus, who never took men at their worst,

would say, Your life is not *all* sordid. To you, also, it is a pleasure to give. You know how to give good gifts to your children, and should not your Father know? He makes His sun to shine on evil and good; He does not talk about repayment to those who are in His debt.

> "There is no price on the lavish summer,
> And spring is free to the meanest comer."

Love travels down more easily than it climbs; the love of parents for their children has always been richer and more self-sacrificing than that of children for their parents; and we must not wonder if the love of God is inconceivably greater, more magnanimous, and more patient than the love of man to God. "It is a *river* whose streams make glad the city of God." I do not know how else to read the story of Jesus except as exhibiting the giving heart of God; and the farther one penetrates into that story, the more the wonder grows. There seems to be no end or limit to His giving, who was actually revived as if by food and drink by the mere chance of helping a bewildered woman. Paul, in his Roman letter, dwells on the thought of the multitudinous offences of men,—a whole world gone astray, a world enfeebled, degraded, enslaved, with each generation passing on to that which follows the inheritance of a huge catastrophe. It is a shoreless sea of gloom. But then Paul lifts his eyes, and looks upon another immeasurable fact: "Where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceed-

ingly, that as sin reigned in death, even so might grace reign through righteousness to eternal life." And so for Paul, as for George Fox in his vision, a wider sea of light and benediction flows over that dark sea of grief, and in the end nothing is left but grace. That is what Jesus shows in life and death. God's way of winning back the world of men is not by giving and receiving, His doing so much in order to encourage us to do all we can; He wins men back by giving with both hands. And in order that He might the better give what was His, He took what was ours, entering into our conditions, sharing our exclusions, taking our fault upon His heart, so that, being in fellowship with us, He might give us all He had. "Take, eat," He said, "it is My body, and it is for you."

That is God's way; His gift is for those who have no money. The want of title, which makes men shy of Him, is really the best of titles. The sense of remoteness is better than any fancied nearness. If you have never looked His way before, He is doubly glad that your eyes should turn now to Him who has sought for you. It is not possible, if we take Jesus at His word, to be too frank in stating our case to God; it is not possible to be too insistent or too clamorous. Jesus smilingly used the image of an improvident neighbour, battering at a cottage door at midnight to get the bread he should have thought about before; and He said to all faint-hearted petitioners, conscious that they have no stateable plea,

"Do not leave off: you will get all you want." The great thing for some of us is to break up this frozen silence in which so many hearts are perishing, for it is better to use unworthy and foolish words than not to speak to your Father at all. You have discontents and desires and longings, do not leave them unexpressed. Say to Him who can hear, "Father, I am Thy son come home, tired and hungry and disgraced. I am no credit to Thy house; but I want a place to sit down in, I want something to stay this hunger at my heart, I want everything, for I have nothing. And I believe that Thou, who didst once give Jesus to the world, canst give me all I need and more. Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief." "Let him that hath no money come, and buy, and eat, without money and without price." There is no way in which men please God so much as by suffering Him to give them all He will.

VII.

HE WHO IS FIT TO BE KING.

"The government shall be upon His shoulder."—Isa. ix. 6.

WE are taught in Scripture to think sometimes of redemption as complete, and sometimes as still to be completed. In his Ephesian letter (i. 7), Paul declares that we *have* redemption in Christ's blood; but a little later he speaks (iv. 30) of Christian people as "sealed unto the day of redemption," as if that still belonged to the future. Our Lord upon the Cross cried with a loud voice, It is finished; and we, learning from Him, have rejoiced in the assurance that all that is needed for the salvation of the world has been accomplished. We live in a world redeemed, and the business of preachers everywhere is to declare to all men that redemption is complete, that they do not need now to *earn* God's favour, they must receive it. But, in his vision, John saw "One whose name is the Word of God, sitting on a white horse, riding forth in righteousness to judge and to make war." The contrast does not go far down, but it is wholesome for us that it should exist. For the

mere orthodoxy of opinion may easily grow heartless, and cruel, and lazy, content that all is well, since Christ has died; and we need the summons of the Apostle to make us think of questions as still open, of battles as still to fight. For if we have anything of the heart and the eyes of Jesus, we cannot but feel that the world has little look of redemption upon it. "We are of God," says John, "and the whole world lieth in the Wicked One." Well, are you content that this should be so? and do you think that our Lord is content? We may be well assured that He finished His work, and that, in the matter of his own salvation, a man must consent to be in God's debt for everything; but we cannot acquaint ourselves with the life of any patch or corner of one of our cities without realising what Paul meant when he spoke of redemption as future. There are touches of human kindness, a cheery stoicism which carries men and women and children through cruel straits; there are fragments of half-forgotten piety, very touching as one comes upon them. But after that is said, it remains that here are spirits in prison, a whole society fettered by tradition and environment, by ignorance, and the habit of vice and the crushing power of hopelessness. The situation calls aloud for a Redeemer; His work is before Him there, and if it were not for our faith, we could not hope at all.

But then faith has its voice. When Isaiah cried, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulders," he

was as glad and sure as if the warfare were already over; and the reason is that he looked so deeply into the heart and the endowment of the Deliverer that he did not need to wait for a performance. "We see not yet all things put under man," we read in another Scripture, "but we gaze upon Jesus"; and how does that writer conceive of Him? Not as sitting at the right hand of God with all His work behind Him, "we gaze upon Him crowned with this exceeding honour, that, by the grace of God, He is permitted to taste death for every man." Again, as in Isaiah, we see how faith was steadied not by the knowledge that battles were past, but by the recognition of the endowment of Him on whom had been laid the burden of delivering His fellows.

Let me speak, then, of the native quality of God's King, and afterwards of the way in which He sets about His task.

1. Our faith for the world rests on a clear perception of the native quality of God's King. The prophet was not blind to the prospects of his time. In the seventh chapter he anticipates that the land will fall back to wilderness. Where vineyards had once brought wealth to the peasants, there would be thickets through which a chance hunter would struggle in pursuit of game. The crowded population of the older time would disappear, and nothing be left but a stout-hearted farmer here and there, fighting for a livelihood, with a cow and a sheep or two in some tiny patch of clearing; for the days of big flocks and

of corn should be gone. That is to say, it is in a ruined land, in conditions that are clearly desperate, that the Deliverer shall grow up. But the prophet talks of the future with an entire rest and certainty of heart. There is something extraordinary, if you think of it, in the attitude of these Old Testament men to the Christ whom they had not seen. "Abraham exulted because he was to see My day," said Jesus, by which He did not mean that the patriarch, articulately and in detail, saw all that Jesus was to be and to do. Only as Abraham looked in one direction, anticipating great and greater things from the kindness of God, he felt like a man who has got into the track of the Trade Winds which blow across an ocean, and he felt that there was no limit to the distance to which these powers might carry him. Faith no longer was an effort and a labour. There were forces assisting it. Having received so much, he was persuaded that there was infinitely more in reserve. "The tide will not listen to any voice of restraint, nor will the spirit of man. From afar, impulses rise within it which it cannot repress, strange pressures from behind out of the deeps of past human life, and mysterious drawings from above lifting it up and leading it on." It is a rebuke even to read of these things; the men were so sure of Him, not merely that He would come, but that when He came He would meet the necessities of the hour. And they were sure of Him because they were sure of God, and the Christ for whom they looked was

God's gift to His people, answering to God's estimate of what the day required. They did not fancy that they saw more deeply than God; and if, to them, the occasion looked desperate, they were sure that He had seen it also and would provide for all. Their business was to do justice to the nature of Him whom God would send as Saviour. In God's good time there will be born in conditions of utter disadvantage a Child. He will have no help in outward circumstance, no nation shouting welcomes to Him, no prestige of an ancient name. Isaiah speaks vaguely of the mother of Messiah as a maiden, any maiden, some one starting with her husband to-morrow, perhaps, but where, and in what station he could not guess and he did not ask. These externals of David's house or city did not for him constitute any part of the sufficiency of the Christ. What made him confident was that *God* was sending a Deliverer, and He would surely give to Him whatever wealth of nature He required. And so, looking down upon the Child in His cradle, the prophet declares with the solemn calm of absolute conviction, "The government shall come to be upon his shoulders." As he looked on through the years, he saw men laying their burdens more and more on One who was fit to bear, asking guidance in new perplexities from One who had the gift of knowing the way. He did not mark any limit to the benignant influence of the Coming One. Wherever there were men and need, His power would spread, for One so endowed of God must be adequate for all things.

That ignoring of what is external has its perpetual lesson. If Isaiah and others had insisted on extraordinary occurrences or a particular descent as marking out the Christ, men might have done honour to the miracle or to the successor of David; but he was careful that all honour should be reserved for the Christ and not wasted on an accident. That was also Jesus' way. Miracles accompanied His work, but He took them as accidental. They were overflowings of His nature, and not the real or the deepest thing in Him; and any one who believed only for the miracles, He scarcely counted a believer at all. He wanted men to follow Him for the truth He taught, for the life He gave, and not for some occasional sparkles of miraculous light. In all human work it is a man's self that counts; whatever his task, he has to take it home to himself. Nothing that is external or adventitious, nothing of birth or reputation, counts in these more intimate wrestlings. As Carlyle puts it, a man has "to grapple with his dragon and try whether it is stronger or he." "Sheer, obstinate toughness of muscle, but much more toughness of heart, persistence, unsubduable patience and valour, that is his strength in wrestling with his dragon. The whole man's strength is in this work, and we shall get the measure of him there." I often feel that we get very little measure of Christ's quality within some of our churches. Men gather for such diverse reasons here: custom, society, some vague sentiment, some touch of culture, all these are at work in bringing us together

But on another level, where men have got beyond convention, and are clearly outcast and disreputable, there we see what Christ can do. It is a matter of real gladness when a boy, well bred, discovers in his heart a new deepness and desire, and wishes to assume the Christian name; it is a cause for gladness, but scarcely for astonishment. But where the powers of training have worked the other way, where neighbours do not help but hinder, if Jesus Christ can deliver, it must be by the real pith and power of His nature. There is a perverted sincerity in the outcast; they do not need to show respect for what is good, they may actually win applause by not showing it. Hypocrisy they may use as an instrument for extorting money from fools, but amongst themselves they are past hypocrisy; and if they come to Jesus Christ, it is because of something they have found in Him. And if we are to look without dismay into these dark places, we must far more deeply than in the past search the secrets of the power of our Lord's nature.

2. But this faith of Isaiah's rested not only on the wealth of nature of the Christ, but on the way in which He would set to work. "The government shall come to be upon His shoulder," says the prophet. "He shall not only wear the badge of government, He shall bear the burden of it. He shall set His shoulder to it, and will never complain, as Moses did, of being overcharged" (Matthew Henry). Listen for a moment to that older story: Moses

petulantly exclaims, "I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. Have I conceived all this people? Have I brought them forth, that Thou shouldest say, Carry them in thy bosom as a nurse carries a sucking child, into the land which Thou swearest to their fathers? Whence should I have flesh to give to all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh that we may eat. And if Thou deal thus with me, kill me out of hand, that I may not see the wretchedness of my own failure." That is the cry of a man overtasked, who, with all his nation-building faculty, had yet his limitations. Government is a burden to any man who makes conscience of it, and a light-hearted king will never be a great king. (Cheyne notes how vizier comes from *wezir*, *i.e.* burdened.) But here is One who takes His business seriously, who has no interest of His own apart from that of His people, and whose mind is set on this, that he shall have no ease so long as His people bear a load. There is promise in that image of the bowed back of the King; and long afterwards, as Matthew watched his Master at work, and saw what a single day of help and healing cost Him, an old saying flashed up in his remembrance, "Himself took our infirmities and carried our sicknesses." The load must be borne by some one, and it was Christ's thought of Kingship that it should be laid upon Him.

But, going deeper, we come upon one of the roots of authority. This government, which has no frontier, rests upon association. The King begins

where His people do, knowing from His birth what life is for the hard-driven and the poor. Stint and peril and hardship, the conditions of a poor man's life, are no flatterers, but, whatever his endowment, they make him feel what things really are. There is no thing that embitters a people more than the sense that those who hold the reins of government do not know what life is for a poor man. If they had ever done a week of hard physical toil, or had experienced the wearing anxiety for bread, if they had shared the cramped and unhomely conditions of life in a single room, they would speak with another tone. A living statesman, in answer to a deputation on licensing questions, spoke of the small beer which he drank at Eton, and the little harm it had done him, as if the pinch were there. And though few are as cynical and as ignorant as he, yet government everywhere suffers in authority through its lack of knowledge of what life means for the mass of the governed. "A prince without letters," says Ben Jonson, "is a pilot without eyes; all his government is groping." That is a phrase which describes a considerable part of the legislation of both political parties; it is groping, and one principal want is knowledge. But this Prince begins at the level of His people; He shares the common elements of suffering, tasting with His fellows the joy and fear and struggle of a poor man's life. Jesus, as we see Him in the Gospels, was much more careful to assert His community of interest than His separateness

from men; for though He knew that there were differences of nature parting Him from the others, He was not ashamed to call them brethren. He would not turn stones to bread for Himself; for if hunger were His lot, there were others who had hungered too, and He would bear what they had borne. At the Baptism, which spoke of the cleansing of sin and of introduction into a closer relation with God, He might well have stood apart; but, in the sight of the sun and by His own choice, He was numbered with the transgressors. Lest men should ever think that He was above temptation, He lifted the curtain and suffered them to see how hardly pressed He was, in the Wilderness and in Gethsemane, where His sweat fell down like heavy drops of blood. That is the secret of His authority; when He gives a command He knows what it costs to fulfil it. His government of men is a sort of communion with them, in which He shares their feelings and communicates His own. "In all their affliction He was afflicted, it is said, and the angel of His presence saved them." That is how His authority constrains, for He speaks as from amongst us, as One who is with us to help us through.

A faith like this, resting on what Christ is and on the way He takes, has no limit. "The government" here spoken of is entirely vague; it is not of any particular land, rather, as a contemporary writer says (Mic. v. 4), "He shall be great unto the ends of the earth." Isaiah's was only a little world, confined on the west of the estranging sea, and on the east by

wide deserts. But outside of that little patch of light, there were lands half-concealed by the shadow, and it seemed to the prophet that a King such as he foresaw would find His subjects wherever there were men. "Of the increase of His government and of peace there shall be no end." "In other empires, what began in gold ended in iron and clay"; great tasks fall into feeble hands, large plans are misapprehended and distorted by men of smaller wit; but the kingdom of Christ is a growing kingdom, whose perfecting is yet to be. And it grows because He lives. He faces the need of each new age with the same power of heart; He measures Himself against the trouble and perplexity of the time. It is an ancient battle in which there is no discharge, but "He shall not faint nor be discouraged until He have set judgment in the earth."

That is an old saying, but what do you, men of to-day, think of Jesus Christ? Is it really your desire that He should be King? He spoke of some who call Him Lord but would not do His will, and thus to name Him King is a weighty matter. To be a King He came into the world, and of all the men who come to Him He asks obedience first.

VIII.

JORDAN OR ABANAH?

"Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean?"—2 KINGS v. 12.

MANY voices are lifted up to-day in praise of Abanah and Pharpar. People protest that the old ways of religion are narrow, and that the claim that they alone lead to God is extravagant. The world has other streams in it than the Jordan, why should I not wash in one of them? There are Greeks in history as well as Hebrews,—why should I not make my choice of teacher? Zechariah speaks (viii. 23) of a time when ten men out of all the nations will take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, "We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." Well, it was natural for a man to set his own country first, but why should all other nations sit in thrall to Israel? People say, "We get more good from Wordsworth, from Ruskin, from Emerson. These men really help us, raising and purifying our thoughts, why should you always drive us back upon the Bible

as the one authority?" If they were quite frank, many people in all the Churches would exclaim with Peter, "Let us here make three or thirty tabernacles, and get the good of many teachers in one place." In this there is an element of misunderstanding, so let me speak first to the advocates of Jordan, and then of Abanah.

1. Let us be candid, and admit that a good deal of the protest is due to faults of our own. The Church in the past has been unjust to much that is supremely excellent. It has been so anxious to exalt the grace that is received by faith that it has been far too willing to make over to Abanah and Pharpar all the achievements and even all the good qualities of the natural man; because they do not save, they have been spoken of with a kind of impatience as if they had no significance at all. And yet, what treasures are discovered in that region! Courage, chivalry, truth, the trust of children, the ungrudging tenderness of women, the unflinching loyalty to truth of people who yet, in a technical sense, are not religious. It is not surprising that men of resolute morality should sometimes say, "These are the things for which we care; and if they belong to Abanah and not to Jordan, if these are mere secular moralities and not a part of religion, our choice is quickly made." I say these sweeping judgments on the part of Christian preachers are responsible for much of the protest of to-day.

And there is another injustice of which the Church has been guilty. After all, Abanah and Pharpar are God's rivers too, and His people have been far too slow to recognise what of His power and thought is in them. Think what books are. Our literature has grown out of a Christian civilisation, and is rich in actual Christian ideas. But beyond that, there are seeds of truth and of thought in writers who were before Christ or apart from Christ. The early Greek Fathers spoke of "a scattered word"; they felt that, in their measure, Plato and his fellows, whenever they touched their highest, became prophets and witnesses beforehand of the Christ. It was only in later days that this unwisdom appeared which inclined men in a mistaken zeal to draw the line too closely, which separates the sacred from the secular. It is never safe to say what books cannot achieve; Emerson speaks of their "genial, *miraculous* force." One great writer confesses that it was Wordsworth who re-created his supreme divinity, giving him a new and living Spirit in place of a Deity who had hardened into an idol; and that is a testimony which might be repeated by many. God, certainly, has not left Himself without a witness in what is called secular literature. Think of what books do for our life, how much poorer it would be in emotion and hope and understanding but for them. A great writer takes you by the hand, and he leads you —a blunt and undiscerning man, with much in

your conditions which is fitted to harden—into the company of people who are kinder, braver, simpler than your fellows of every day. He makes you for the time the companion of a little child, and forces you to recognise "the frailty which appeals to forbearance, the innocence which symbolises the heavenly, the simplicity which lies so far apart from your worldly ways." And you lay the book down, with thoughts at work within you which have long been strangers. This is the effect of all the greatest literature. It makes us feel vividly and with understanding conditions for which the ordinary life may give little opportunity, and so it may save us from the cramping influence of our daily business. It may keep the door open for us which leads out into the great world of men, with their real lives and pains and faith. That is not a trifling service; and if it be the duty of a Christian man to think of such things as are pure and lovely and of good report, this sphere of human achievement can never safely be ignored.

Of course, in the protest on behalf of Abanah there is a considerable element of indolence. People often say that a book does them good, or, for that matter, that a preacher does them good, because there is no difficulty in understanding him. They do not need to stir up their minds to meet and grapple with him, which for many hearers is a supreme commendation. You produce a book which speaks in the language of to-day, and which discusses

questions about which people are talking, and it finds its audience ready made. A new novel may have far more readers in a year than *Macbeth*, because it yields what is in it more easily. But what would your judgment be of a man or woman who measured them on that account, and set aside the older work as out of date? Laziness has no right to dictate. A book, just because it is for all time, may require a patient and reverent study, which many people will not give. Its office is to deliver them from the servitude in which they live to their own day and its little round of thoughts and questions, and make them free of the greater world, of the thought and emotion of all time. That means strain, and no book is harder to read than a great part of Scripture. It is only by labour and patience and teachableness that men can find their way into it, coming a little further at every fresh return; and in the end, the sense remains with them that there is more to be discovered yet.

So let me repeat that God is not jealous, and that His people also should not be jealous, of Abanah and Pharpar. They are His rivers. He made the earth, and He looks on it with nothing of disdain. Even to those who might be called His enemies, He does not grudge their virtues. His loving-kindness is over *all* His works, and we should learn something of His large indulgence. "Divinity need not be ashamed," says an old writer, "to wear the jewels and earrings of Egypt"; they are in many things

so full of lustre, and so excellent. The Church has been learning this lesson, and yet the effect of her disdain and narrowness lives on in the protest of men to-day. Here are books, they say, which serve us greatly, here are qualities of character which are wholly noble and lovely, and yet these books and qualities are under suspicion. They are said not to be of Jordan. Well, if that be so, say these protesters, we have the less regard for Jordan. That is a fair retort; and it is one which we, who believe in our hearts in the power of Jordan, must guard against.

2. But now, let me speak to those who are advocates of Abanah. People who express their preference on this side are in danger of forgetting what the question really is about. When a man makes comparison of Jordan or Abanah, of Scripture or poetry, of evangelism or ethical discourse, he is apt to lay stress on what is not the point. I find this more interesting, he says, fresher and more original; I prefer this man for his style, for his wit and charm. But that is not where the matter is decided, and he who thinks of Christ and of Christian preaching only in that way has not really faced the question. Let me put the matter thus: the great French preacher Ravignan said to Lacordaire, "I hear that you had such a crowd at your last sermon that the people were sitting even on the top of the confessionals." "Ah! perhaps," said the other; "but you manage to make them go *into* the

confessionals." That is a real distinction. There is the one interest—of a spectator, who admires from outside, and there is the entirely distinct and separate interest of the man who wants to possess. The one preacher had the people clustering like bees on every vantage ground in the cathedral, and they admired and preferred,—and by his own admission, they went away unaltered. The other armed his words with hooks and stings, and when the people —far fewer this time—left the Church the word went with them, and wrought in them. In which case would you say that Christ was truly preached? Is it a message for admiration or a message with result?

Now, when we talk of Jordan and Abanah, let us make the point of contrast clear. Emerson says: "People imagine that the place the Bible holds in the world it owes to miracles. It owes it simply to the fact that it came out of a profounder depth of thought than any other book, and the effect must be proportionate." But that does not yet bring us to where the matter must be judged. Here was a man stricken with leprosy—a sort of living death; it had begun, and for all that the skill of his time could do, it was bound to run on to the end. Leprosy had none of the grace which gives a man, at least, a speedy quittance from his pains; slowly it wore life out, darkening, in the meanwhile, every prospect. Nothing had taste or savour, nothing was cheering; horror and strange loneliness waited for the victim. And it was in view

of that the choice had to be made. A thousand things might be said for Abanah, but if a man wants healing, other considerations are irrelevant. His crowded and various life is narrowed to the one consideration,—I am a sick man, a lost man. Love of country might have its word, the memory of the glint of pools which he had known in his boyhood, and the sense that, in comparison, Jordan's turbid waters were unlovely. But then, scattering all such memories, the other thought drove in, could Abanah at its fairest give a leper health? Friends, the Christian faith asks for judgment not on the ground of the stimulus which it has for minds, or the charm which it also can disclose when rightly handled; it stands or falls as a religion of salvation, a religion of deliverance. In this world there has never been wanting the agonising cry for help. Some of us know of themselves what draws it forth. It comes from men like Naaman stricken with mortal sickness and facing hopelessly out towards the dark. It comes when men are overwhelmed by the blind perplexity of the world, in which everything seems awry. It comes when a man is crushed by the burden of himself, by the sense that his own life is out of joint; and as he dwells on the thought of his demerit, he feels that for all that he or the whole universe of creatures can attempt he is beyond recovery. And just because these feelings are near and possible for every one, Jesus Christ is all the world's Saviour. It is easy for men standing by to try and soothe a friend. The horror is not in their hearts,

and they cannot even imagine how a remedy should be seriously desired. But the horror is in his heart —a principle of judgment going on to anticipate the judgments of a higher tribunal with more effectual sentences. Of course the man of prosperous common sense suspects delusion. But there are many things which we cannot see when we are well and prosperous, and there is a tremendous reality in the horror of a man who knows that he is lost, and who does not know where to turn. That is where Christ offers Himself. The Christian faith is nothing less than "a casket of precious remedies," and what sets it above all systems besides is its power of bringing health and hope to a desperate creature. It claims that it can do something, that it can bring back purity of heart, and the settled peace, and the joy of reconciliation. If you are to judge between Abanah and Jordan, it is there that the judgment must be made.

Now, when that is said, we need no longer be surprised that the remedy should not wait upon our liking. Why Jordan? Are there no other streams? Will what lies close to my home not do as well? That is talking foolishly, for we have nothing to do with preference here, but with effectiveness. There is no wanton avoidance of what is homely, no flouting of human nature; there is the search for what will do the work. If you wish for stimulus, interest, debate, you may find them also within the Church of Jesus, but these are not its office. It speaks of salvation. The others may interest and charm, but soon their

influence finds its limit. Christ wishes to make another man of you, and your preference for them may simply mean that you are not prepared for change. "What meets us in the Gospels," says Estlin Carpenter, "is not so much novelty of teaching in the sense of the announcement of truths unknown before, but newness of being, originality of character, a fresh outlook upon the world, an unexpected demand for action, a closer walk with God." "Newness of being," —that is what Christ claims to give, a clean heart, a heart which hopes and which receives; and "an unexpected demand for action,"—He says to you who have lived for twenty years impotent and futile, Arise and walk. Begin to care for other men; bear their burdens, and think less about your own. I bore a cross; come you after me, bearing a cross also. It is no wonder that the indolence of our nature is in revolt against a remedy like that. Arise!—and I cannot arise. Some think it too good to be true, and so they will not try it; and some think it too hard and forbidding, and they go away in a rage. "But Wisdom is justified of her children."

The remedy which Jesus offers is in bringing us to God. "I am the Way," He said, "no man cometh to the Father but by Me." He, who is the Mediator, faces you with His promise that you may be the friend of God from this very moment. That is salvation; out of the whirl of unsubstantial things, which come and go, to attain to Him who is true. Sickness and loneliness can be borne when that is secure. The

tyranny of things visible is relaxed when that Invisible is revealed. Do you remember what Bunyan says of Christian when he came to the Cross ?—"The burden loosed from his shoulders and fell from off his back into the sepulchre, and I saw it no more." That is the experience of every man who comes to see how God takes upon Himself the task of setting His creatures right.

I fear that much of our preference for Abanah is due to our human unwillingness to meet God. We have our own thoughts about Him, and we welcome new thoughts, with which we can play for a while and then lay them aside, when serious matters of business intrude. But nakedly to see Him and "to hear Him as the heart heareth," so that there is no room for doubt, to lie naked and open in His sight, how many of us shrink from that! And that is what the Bible lives for; "the end of Scripture is not merely to give us new thoughts of God, but to bring us into a human communion of love with Him." Christ shows us what God is, but, more than that, He helps us to Him, and makes our relation with Him simple and childlike. Looking to these desperate conditions of our mortal life, where men often have to cry aloud for help, He says, "Ask, and ye shall receive." If you, with all your faults, give your child what good you can, will your Heavenly Father not give the Holy Spirit to those that *ask*? Jordan lies as near as that, across your very path, a word to believe, a Friend to trust, a gift to accept; and the mere receiving

of it may change the face of the world for you. Sometimes our pride is up in arms,—that is when we are little conscious of need; but there are also days when above all feelings is the thankfulness that we have to do no more—only to wash in Jordan, to go down into the river at our feet. Ah, friends, if any of your hearts are sore to-day, you will rejoice to hear of a remedy so near and so plain.

IX.

THE BESETTING GOD.

"Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord."—JONAH i. 3.

IN this book we have, along with other lessons, an exhibition given of the omnipresence of God. Jonah began by ignoring that. He did not wish to do God's will, and he fancied that he could escape from the constraint of it by flight. In another land, hidden amongst strangers, he would be out of reach of God. That is where the story begins; but running all through it, is a curious and subtle demonstration of how God is everywhere. Jonah got out on to the wide sea only to be checked there by God's hand in the storm, to be detected through the working of the lot, to be rebuked by the justice and the compassion of the heathen sailors, and at last to be borne back to his duty by the sea monster. Facing his task again, but with no better inclination, he went to Nineveh, and there he found God humbling the pride of the Assyrian people and moving them to repentance; at God's call the gourd shot up and withered. God entered into the secrets of Jonah's heart and read to

him the meaning of his own bitterness. For the instruction of all men, the prophet is thus led about in a world where every least considered incident is shown as of God's contrivance. The whole of life appears as like the bush which burned with fire, when the light of God's own presence transfigured every twig and leaf. In Jonah's thought the greater part of life had been godless, and he had to learn that in the world there was only one godless object—himself; other things did God's will, whilst he fled from it. In all else God was found, whilst, in his sullen heart, there lived reluctance that the Ninevites should share the divine forgiveness, an obstinate persuasion that no view was allowable except his own, and a fierce resentment against the Most High because He was not quick to destroy the work of His hands. These were the spirits which inhabited Jonah's heart, and made him the ungodliest object that we meet with in his story.

1. This attempted flight from God is not uncommon. Men do not, of course, take ships for distant ports with the notion that God's authority has geographical limits, but they constantly shrink from whatever would bring them face to face with Him, and they welcome anything which seems to promise shelter. I suppose that the reason might be found in the instinct of self-protection. More or less clearly, every one of us feels that if he suffered the thought of God to come close to him, he would need to be a different man. How far that might carry us, our

instincts do not declare; what strains upon courage and faith it might involve we cannot even guess; but something we must give up of self-indulgence and of unworthy acquaintance, and we dimly fear and shrink away. "He that is near me," said the Lord, "is near the fire." In yielding to His call, I should enter upon an unknown road, where there may be some sort of dignity, but where there is a terrible lack of homeliness and ease. Our natures shrink abashed from the notion of continuous intercourse with men who are immensely our superiors, for we prefer to live in a mental and spiritual undress. In our reading, we may occasionally grapple with a great book, but those which we like best are books we can take liberties with, and dip into,—books which can be enjoyed when we are tired. And this call to face God is a provocation to our indolence, from which we gladly seek escape.

Most men, in their instincts, wish to remain in character as they are, and they defend themselves, as from an assault, against all that would bring revolution into their lives. With more or less of consciousness, they are hiding; they may use their necessary and honourable callings as a screen, or they may invent more enchaining interests. They read and let another man's thought and emotion stand between them and the need of thinking and feeling for themselves; they work, and try to forget that God asks something of them, and that, if they were true to themselves, they would be different men; plunging

into society, they let the talk and laughter of acquaintances drown the voice of God; they accept the conventions of their circle as a rule of life, and thus they avoid any fresh or first hand dealing with God as to what life should be. It has been said of Macaulay that "he was always conversing, or reading, or recollecting, or composing, but never reflecting"; and, with a little alteration in the words, the same is true of a mass of men and women. "This is the reason," says Pascal, "why gaming, and women's talk, and war, and high office are so sought for. It is not that happiness lies in them, for no one imagines that the true beatitude is found in the money won at a gambling-table, or in coursing a hare. . . . That hare could not, in itself, defend a man from thoughts of death and misery, but the excitement of the chase defends him. What they find there is a violent occupation which keeps them from thinking of themselves."

Nothing should more promptly make us aware of the truth of this than the difficulty we have in what is purely religious. How impatient men are of worship! how quickly they are tired of spiritual teaching! how great a burden the Sabbath is to many of us, and how eagerly upon that day they flock to whatever has a touch of secularity! Sometimes our "miraculous editors" speak scornfully of the puritanical rigours of the past, and of the increased enlightenment of to-day, but the reaction is as old as spiritual religion. In Jeremiah already we read, "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel or a land of thick

darkness? wherefore do my people say, We are broken loose, we will come no more unto Thee?" That is a saying very full of pathos, if we believe in the love of God; for He, who seeks for men, finds His companionship treated as a spreading shadow of gloom. Ought it to be a burden to spend an hour in thoughts of God and His will? Is it only the preacher's fault that a light comes into so many faces with the conclusion of the sermon, and that there is a reaction of worldliness at the church door? Adam hiding in the trees is a very ancient symbol, for men are restless until they can bury themselves in their wonted secularities, and escape from the disturbing sense of the presence of the Divine.

2. This book shows the other side of the screens which we set up. Jonah flees from God, and, counting each hour at sea an hour gained, he welcomes the freshening breeze which bears him away from his Master. But He makes the wind His messenger, and in a little, Jonah discovers that his flight has borne him into the secret place of God. There is an element of grave comedy in the spectacle of a man congratulating himself on his escape, when, all the time, he is running into the net. De Quincey describes two Spanish deserters, who struck across the Andes in their flight, and perished on the high snow fields. "What had frost and snow to do with the quarrel? But great kings have long arms, and these things made themselves sycophantic servants to the King of Spain, and they it was who dogged his deserters up to the

summit of the Cordilleras more surely than any Spanish bloodhound or any Spanish marksman's bullet." Those who seek escape from the presence of God should consider that the very occupations and interests in which they hide themselves are of His creation. These daily callings in which we are less conscious of His importunity and rebuke are the field in which it is hardest to please Him, and in which His will is most insistent. There is no place in which it is more difficult to satisfy God than in our common work. Nowhere are heroism and chivalry more needed than in business; in nothing are we more certain to be judged than in those things which engage us every day. And thus, whenever in our secular calling we would flee from God, we are repeating Jonah's error, for we are hiding where His challenge is most certain to find us out.

In all phases of this flight men are pursued. In each new friendship and relation, in each fresh interest and engagement, He has lessons for you to learn, qualities to exhibit, habits to abandon, services to render. There is nothing secular. The world itself is a screen, but it is a screen of His contriving, to temper for us the brightness of His glory. "He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust." We could not now endure the fulness of His majesty; and as we look through smoked glasses at the sun, so we learn to know Him through the shadowed medium of the material world.

"And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love;
And these black bodies and this sunburnt face
Are but a cloud, and like a shady grove.
For, when our souls have learned the heat to bear,
The cloud will vanish, we shall hear His voice,
Saying, 'Come out from the grove, My love and care,
And round My golden tent like lambs rejoice.'"

There is no escape in the world, there is nothing but a gracious veiling of a light too clear and searching, that we may bear it and learn to walk in it, and then we shall pass out from the shadow into the full day. "Now we see in a glass indistinctly; but then face to face."

What is the profit of hiding thus not from God but from ourselves, when the day will come? Though we misuse the present, and take God's own creation as a screen to hide Him from us, the time is not far off when creation itself must cease, and the veil be rent from top to bottom, and when we must go out where the shows and pretences of sense have vanished, and the pleasures and the tasks alike are spiritual. "There they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the light of it," and existence must be intolerable except for those who have found that it is life to know the only true God. What can be the end of this hunted, fugitive life, whose ideal of comfort is in God's absence? Some have already realised the fact, and they say with Moses, "I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory." They have grown im-

patient of the limitations of the light, and would fain know as they are known. But others seek congenial twilights. If it were possible, they would take ship, with Jonah, to flee from God's presence; they would welcome a frankly secular earth. That is the mean side of us, the ease-loving, unadventurous side, which is always willing to sell the birthright for a mess of pottage. That degrades and impoverishes everything, and, as George Meredith says, "Nature comes to have neither music nor meaning, and is rock, stone, tree, and nothing more." The beauty dies out of things, and the promise. And all God's dealings, with us as with Jonah, have it as their end to raise the nobler part of us to mastery. What you used as screen, He gives you now as a glass through which to see Him; where you seemed far from Him, He makes you know how near He is; and what seemed most secular and least significant, He turns to be the real centre of your life.

One thing more should be said. You need to be able to see God before you do see Him. Jonah was brought back to his work like a deserter, sulkily persuaded that there was no escape by sea, but with no better heart for God's service than before, for God was not yet in his thoughts. A man generally becomes convinced of providence through his conversion; for when he once has grasped the truth that for him Christ died, it seems to follow as of course that for him God will care in everything. So long as he feels himself an unreckoned unit in the hosts of men, so

long will he seek in vain for any confidence that the Most High is making all things work together for his good; but when the comfortable assurance breaks in upon his mind that God verily loves him, then all about him there appear tokens and workings of that love. The world, the dead world, in which he had sought to hide, becomes alive, and God is seen in all and through all and over all. That is what Jesus does for us; He narrows every question. The thought of omnipresence itself is beset with mystery, and He shows us God verily present in Himself, so that we can see Him, and gaze, and lay hold upon Him. It is a world of confusion and dimness, but Jesus is a centre of light about which there gathers a new world of certitudes. "The Son of God who was preached among you by us," says Paul, "was not yea *and* nay"—a tissue of ambiguities and uncertainties —"but in Him was yea." And those who know Him thus make their home not with the things which perplex, but with those which are clear. Mysteries encompass them still, but they know that Christ can help them on their way, that He has gifts of life and healing, and that matters which now are greatly dark will one day be made plain. "Through Him," says Peter, "we are believers in God."

It is a grave decision when a man chooses Christ as Master. He burns his boats, and cannot go back if he would; but then he has no wish that way. He has found what his heart has long desired, and to look away from his Lord would mean the loss of

happy hours. And as he lives in this disciple life he makes a huge discovery. For he who shrank from God, the Unknown, the Inexorable, is now contentedly hiding himself in the very place of fear. Once he said, "Whither shall I flee from Thy presence?" but now he says, "I flee to Thee to hide me." "In the shadow of Thy wings do I put my trust." And then he has learned his lesson.

X.

GOD'S USE OF COMPULSION.

"Be not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose trappings must be bit and bridle, to hold them in, else they will not come near to thee."—Ps. xxxii. 9.

"BE not as the horse, or the mule, which have no understanding: whose trappings must be bit and bridle, to hold them in, else they will not come near to thee"; that is to say, a horse does not wear harness for ornament. However gay its trappings may be, they are the badge of its lack of intelligence, the instrument by which a man imposes his will upon a creature which cannot otherwise be made to understand. There are exceptional animals and there are miracles of training, but, in the rough, it is true that bit and bridle are there, because the creature has little understanding; and if there is compulsion in God's management of men, it is because they also are without understanding; and His will for us is to rise above compulsion, and to deal with us on quite another footing.

Thomas Fuller bids his readers consider the causes why a broken leg is incurable in a horse and easily

curable in a man. "The horse is incapable of counsel to submit himself to the farrier, and therefore, in case his leg be set, he flings, flounces, and flies out, unjointing it again by his misemployed mettle, counting all binding to be shackles and fetters to him; whereas a man willingly resigns himself to be ordered by the surgeon, preferring to be a prisoner for some days rather than to be a cripple all his life." In that case, the intelligent creature seems to have a clear advantage; but the balance is not always on the one side, and Mr. Spurgeon quotes from Donne a saying that "they have sea room enough that will compare a beast and a sinner together, and they shall find many times that the beast is the better man." The point of the text is that God seeks to deal with men as reasonable creatures, and that it is against His will and against man's nature that He should use compulsion. Force is no remedy; and when God has to force a man, He is dealing with the intelligent creature, for whom other appeals should be possible, as if he were a mere brute.

Let me speak, then, of God's compulsions and of His other appeals.

1. It is clear that this man thought of himself as one who had yielded only to force. He had done his best to keep away from God. These were hard days, he tells us; his bones waxed old, for the joy and zest seemed to have gone out of life. There was nothing tangible to fight against, for it is not thus that God constrains a man; only it seemed as if a

chilling mist had come down and blotted his pleasures, as if unseen hands were withdrawing all his comforts. He fretted at the discipline, as was most natural, for he wanted life to be as it had been, rich and full of savour; but a power from some unknown quarter had changed all that, and his roaring and his discontent could not restore what he had lost. Like a shy horse, he flung out whenever he came near submission; but, finally, he was forced to yield, and then he saw the face of a Friend! That was what he had been refusing, and had he got his way he would have lost that; "so foolish was I and ignorant, I was as a beast before Thee." A voice from God seemed to gather up the meaning of that passage in his history, "Be not like the horse or the mule, who will, only under constraint, look at a new object or a new face." To be thus shy of God, after so many lessons and so much experience, is irrational; it is not worthy of a man.

I think we might widen out the lesson, and say that all the compulsions which God uses towards men have the one object of bringing them to face Himself, for there is no other thought in God than that His sons should know Him as He is. We can scarcely have lived at all, if we have not discovered that, in the world, there is no word more unmistakable than the word *must*. This life of ours, which has many aspects of softness and indulgence, yet reveals itself to every man at some time as a network of hard necessities and constraints from

which it is vain to break away. We all set out with the notion that we are able to manage for ourselves, but ere long it becomes obvious that another hand is interfering and another will. Our plans fall through. Some one, on whom we counted, dies, or his circumstances or his goodwill may change; our chance comes when we are ill, and cannot make use of it. Two and two obstinately make four, on a day when, if they had made five, it would have suited us much better; but things have a life and being of their own, and they will not bend to give us room to pass. Many of us to-day are in conditions which they never would have chosen, toiling at uncongenial work, mixing with people who are not wholly to their mind. Cowper admits that it was distress which drove him to literature: "I have not chosen or prescribed to myself my own way; I might say I have been compelled and scourged into it."

That is a hard experience, and yet some of us would cheerfully acknowledge that these constraints have not been altogether unkindly. To be refused our own way does seem, at first, the greatest of wrongs; yet if, through that refusal, we learn that there is a better way, our hearts need not be sore. And this man felt that the seemingly envious necessities were nothing else than strong hands which laid hold of him and brought him round to face God. I think the physical world itself, with its unbending laws, has been to men a divine school in which they have come to greater thoughts of God. At first,

they fancied that all things chanced at the arbitrary caprice of some divinity or other, that the sun might turn back on its course, and the steadfast order of the seasons be inverted, if they prayed loudly enough and in the proper way. Out of that vain dream they were scourged by disappointment and disaster, until they realised that there is a law for things, a law which is nothing else than one expression of the orderliness of God's nature. The laws of the physical world are not irksome to any sensible man, rather they are the strong pillars on which the house of life is reared, within which he can live healthy, and provident, and secure. If there were no law in the world, we should be forced to skulk, like planless slaves, under the terror of our Lord's caprice; but "the Creator's uniformity is the creature's liberty." In the world, as it is fashioned, we know where we are and what we have to count on. We are able to make plans, in the confidence that God will keep His word. Foresight, patience, contrivance, with all that these stand for in character, have their opportunity, because the world is ruled by law; and the long history of discoveries in physical science is a commentary on Christ's words, "I have not called you slaves, but friends: for a slave knows not what his master is doing." We should never have known how great God is, if He had given men their way, and had not forced them by the steadfast constraints of law to learn His way.

We do not like to admit that in the world of

character and conduct there is also compulsion. We should like to think that offenders will be let off, and that he who has broken every commandment will somehow, in the end, come right. We turn to the kindlier images of Scripture, and think of the Father and the Good Shepherd; but if we recognise nothing more than these, we have learned the world badly, and we have learned God badly. "Be not deceived," says Paul, "God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that"—and nothing else and nothing less than that—"will he also reap." The love of God our Saviour must not hide from us the deep-lying sternness and majesty of law. John was declaring the naked fact of things when he said, "Every eye shall see Him, and those who pierced Him, and they shall mourn because of Him." Men, made for God, took up arms against the heart and will of God. They struck their blow and fancied they had triumphed; but one day they shall see what it was they really did, and they shall be plunged in an ocean of infinite woe. You think that hard, and cry out for pity; but it is only through constraint and sternness that some people can be made to see; and hope, if it springs up anywhere, rises near the fountain of these tears when they mourn because of Him. "Infinite pity," says Carlyle, "yet also infinite rigour of law; it is so Nature is made; it is so Dante discerned that she was made." If God judged as lightly of our offences as we judge, if He forgave as quickly as we forgive ourselves, we should

never come to righteousness, and we should never know what He is. But through the rigour of His judgments, through the penalties which come on those who break His law, through the mysteries of suffering and atonement, men are compelled into His presence, for all His constraints have that as their end.

Some people think that God is too kind to use compulsion, whilst the truth is that He is too kind not to use compulsion. The world is a network of hard necessities; but, rightly understood, they have grace in them too. There is an intention of mercy in rough winds and sore trials. It was through days and nights of bitterness that I was driven from my own way, says this man. I grew a burden to myself before I yielded, and a burden to my neighbours; but, in the end, I did yield, and I saw no figure of unkindness then, but the very God.

2. This is the noble meaning of God's constraints; but the text hints to us that compulsion, after all, is a second best, and that a man, as an intelligent creature, ought to yield to some other appeal than force. "I drew them with cords of love and with the bands of a man." It would be endless to speak of all God's ways of persuasion, but on some I must comment.

(*a*) In calling men to Himself, God makes appeal to their reason. We leave the issues of life and death in a law-court in the hands of a casual group of men, because their business there is to judge of

facts; and God, by many voices, calls upon us to recognise the facts. "Prima intelligentia ut te noris peccatorem," says Augustine; the beginning of intelligence is to know yourself a sinner. You have a power of self-judgment, and your mind is possessed by some idea of what your life might be. You see the better way and follow the baser. You honour a good man, but you know that you are not good; and from time to time the mists blow back which hide the end of things, giving you an awful sense that the end of these things is death. "The primrose path of dalliance"—the ease, the charm, the irresponsibility, and the essential tragedy of it, you know that, and yet you do not quit it. That, says God in many voices, is not a man's existence, and he who lives in such a way is losing his life. I think that, when closely searched, men have few illusions on these great matters; but they drift from year to year, and let the shadow of age come down, with nothing fixed. It is not that they have never heard, but they will not heed; and they go out, at last, blindly, knowing they have done amiss, and never having sought for friendship with the King of all that country whither they are going. It is unintelligent, it is irrational, and Jesus Christ, the Lord of wisdom, makes appeal to our sense of the facts.

(*b*) And He appeals to us by experience. I am not inclined to trouble you with questions of animal psychology, but you know that though, in a mysterious way, there is a treasuring of experience

even amongst brutes, yet it remains that one mark of difference between the higher and the lower intelligence is in the value which each attaches to experience. For the lower there is no past and no future, nothing but a present which is inhabited by a clamorous desire; but God looks for it in men that they should have some reverent sense of the past.

You are not the first in this strange island of existence; men have been here before you who have tried its resources and explored its mysteries,—wise men in whose presence you bow, men of character and of chivalry to whom you listen with respect; and they tell you what the world contains, its enchantments, its delusions, its satisfactions. No doubt, for every man the world is new, and each has his own experience to make; and yet a youth is curiously settled in unreason who will not listen to the chorus of testimony from the past, but goes where he knows there is danger, and refuses what the wise and good have marked as the best of all. There is bound to be an element of venture in faith; for when Jesus calls a man, He never tells him where He will lead him. To take Him as master, believing His account of you and your capacity rather than the witness of your own heart, to believe that you, a man earth-bound and unstable, are yet fit for the loftiest tasks, that imposes a strain from which you shrink. But He speaks in the witness of the good and brave, who, in their time, have made that venture, and who tell of the welcome they have found. They

too were full of fears, iron and clay as we are, impulsive and short-sighted, living in bursts and then subsiding, in no way saints by nature. And they tell of their Master and ours, of His understanding, His long-suffering, His healing trust, how He does not break the bruised reed, or quench the smouldering wick. Though gusts of passion quenched our light and left us as a scandal to our fellows, He did not reproach. When we were too weak to think of Him, He thought of us; when our minds were crowded by secular affairs, our place remained in His great heart. You never met a Christian man, whose word you could trust, who has not spoken in this way of his Master; it is an unbroken witness from every land and nation and condition. And thus Jesus sends His messengers to prepare His way before Him, inclining men to trust Him when, some day, they shall meet. It surely belongs to our intelligence that we should learn from that witness of the past.

(*c*) And He draws men by their affections. He kindles in them some sense of gratitude, and then, before they know it or have planned to do it, they look up into His face. "The goodness of God," says Paul, "leads to repentance." I do not know how, apart from this, to explain the way in which so many wisely reared boys and girls come to know God. They have always lived in an atmosphere of trust and kindness, and those whom they most honour, honour God the most, bringing to Him the joys and cares of every day. What they know of God is of such a kind that their

minds are prepared to think well of Him; for anything, and especially any good thing, may be looked for from One so bountiful and so strong. They grow up before Him in the teaching and example so well given, that they are already friends of God, and need not that He should utter all His truth to them; they catch at His meaning in a hint, and know Him as their Friend.

By reason, by experience, by affection, God seeks to bring us to Himself; and, in the view of this old singer, to refuse these appeals is to resign your honour as a man, and to take the lower place with those for whom the past is voiceless and dead, and the present is without meaning, and who must be dragged, dishonourably, as by force, to look upon Him. Soon or late, with your consent or against it, there is no evading that, for every eye shall see Him, and the world, which speaks to the wise with so many voices, holds compulsion in reserve for the untaught. "Lead me, Zeus, and I will follow," said the old sage, "for though I resist, I must still follow." By constraint or by persuasion, as brute or as man? To see Him from whose face the earth and heaven flee, or to see an infinite goodwill and a heart to help? What is your ultimate choice as regards God and yourself?

XI.

THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

"The grace of our Lord abounded exceedingly with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."—1 Tim. i. 14.

"THE grace of our Lord abounded exceedingly," says Paul, speaking of Christ as he himself had found Him; and the saying should not embarrass any one who knows what kindness is, for it is always breaking bounds. It creates a sense of surprise in the man who profits by it; "I have not sought for this," he says, "I dared not have asked for it, it comes as pure bounty." And as kindness takes its way, adding point to point of service, the grateful heart forgets to measure, and reckons all that comes a gift past speaking of. So when Paul says that "grace abounded exceedingly," he says nothing more than that it was true to its nature, for it is always breaking bounds. It is never easy for an onlooker to judge of these matters, for he knows too little both of the largeness of the heart that gives and of the kindling gratitude of that which receives; and thus, to many, the expressions of Christ's people have always seemed

extravagant. Long before the Cross, Jesus had brought people of all sorts to acknowledge an infinite indebtedness. But what had He really done? In some He had wrought great wonders, but in others He had done no more than put Himself at their disposal as one on whom, out to the very limit of His resource, they could count as a friend. No gift from Jesus ever seemed a small gift, for it somehow carried a heart with it, and was great with all the wealth of that heart. So it is no wonder that when we come to His supreme gifts, our human words should fail. "The lives of saints," says Faber, "are all flight and song, like the hot-blooded lives of birds." Those who have learned even a little of their obligation have no mind to count or measure; they want a song to unburden their hearts. To them it is altogether marvellous that their Lord should love them at all, and still more that He should love them with such a love. From every true thought of the grace of Jesus Christ there come words which sound extravagant, and deeds which look quixotic, and songs which only hearts on fire can rightly sing, for this grace abounds exceedingly.

Let me exhibit to you something of the variety of Christ's grace as it appears in this wonderful passage.

1. The grace of forgiveness. Paul first became aware of the wonder of this grace where most of us make the same discovery, through realising that in life he had made a stupendous blunder. He was one of those men whom we sometimes meet, who, by early

training and a certain innocence of nature, have been kept right; and even when he had learned much of his Master, he was too sincere a man to miscall his own past. "I have lived before God in all good conscience unto this day," he says. "I serve God from my forefathers in a pure conscience." He had his inward conflicts, as he lets us know, but these were religious rather than moral. With all his correctness of life he had not attained to peace, and his busy intellect sought about for reasons to account for that. But he certainly had never known the affront and humiliation of those who have been mastered by their cowardice or appetite, and whose conscience can never again be clean. That is a huge advantage; and the story is all the more impressive and touching because it might seem that he did not need grace like most of us. His conscience gave no challenge, till suddenly it was brought home to him that it is possible to have a good conscience whilst one is making a bad use of life. To satisfy your own conscience may only mean that you are contenting a very ill-taught and unenlightened person. And one day Paul realised that he had taken up arms against light and love and the hope of all the world; and he had done it ignorantly, without ever suspecting that he was out of the way; which is surely a tremendous admonition to us not to rest in our judgment of ourselves.

The figure of an inquisitor and persecutor is a very odious one, and it is difficult to find a place in one's sympathy for such, hardening his heart against the

movements of pity, and thinking that God is as implacable and as narrow as himself. Jesus has taught us to think more genially of men who sin through passion, and He seems Himself to have reserved His hottest indignation for those whose sin was of the mind,—for Pharisees, and pretenders, and all the host of the censorious. But what was the mind of Jesus towards this man who stood for what is odious in our eyes? He was the enemy of Christ's cause, as every narrow-hearted man is apt to be, but he did not find Christ angry. Instead of that, He was waiting for the chance of giving to Paul the peace which life had failed to bring. One glimpse was permitted of power and tenderness on the road, and then there fell upon Paul's eyes the kindly dark, which shut him in with that Face which he had seen; and when the fit time had come, a strange voice spoke to him, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to thee on the way, hath sent me, that thou shouldest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." That is Christ's way to those who have wounded Him most. When He was on earth He said, "If any man shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him"; for there is no resentment in Jesus, but an unchanging magnanimity and desire to give Himself to men, which is only the greater if men are so blind as not to ask for Him. "I obtained mercy," says Paul. Think how my account was balanced; on the one side was that stubborn refusal to believe, that kicking against the goad by which He had urged me into His

way, that long withdrawal of my life from the service of love and light in the world; and on the other side was first the long catalogue of His mercies, my training, my knowledge of His word, my life with all its experience of His patience; and then, as at the outset of a new period, there came these excellent things, sight and the gift of the Holy Spirit. That is how my Master wishes to treat every one who will allow Him, says Paul; for His grace abounds exceedingly.

The Evangelists report many instances of His bearing towards offenders, and in them all the same note of magnanimity recurs. There was Zacchæus, who seemed very much an intruder in any crowd gathered about a religious teacher. It is bad for a man's character to be hated and scorned as he had been, and life was plunging him deeper and deeper in evil. There was not a kind look for him in all that multitude, and the jeers and curses which found him out on the fig-tree stiffened his heart into purposes of revenge. "Hath not a Jew eyes, ears, members? if you prick him, will he not bleed? if you wrong him, will he not revenge?" Indignant thoughts made his heart sore as he waited, and he never had seemed so far from good as when the Prophet came, whom some thought sent of God. And He looked up to this loneliest and bitterest of men, and said, "Make haste, and come down; for I wish to stay with you." That is to say, instead of reproach and exclusion, Jesus offered intimacy. He went round to a side of the man's life which no one ever now approached, and

asked a favour of him. That, again, is His way; He overlooks the miserable chronicle of failure, He disregards the judgments which men have formed about you, and even the judgment you have formed of yourself; He proposes to turn down that sullied page of life and to let you start afresh with Him as Friend and Teacher. "It is a wonderful easing to a man to be acknowledged of the good," says Davidson; and it is like a new birth of the soul when the acknowledgment comes from Him who alone of men deserves the name of good. We are always apt, in spite of evangelical training, to interpose something between our present condition and the grace of God; there are unconscious delays and promises of amendment, as if God could only love what has already grown to be lovely, or could only help what is ceasing to need His help. But no healing comes in that way. "If ye love them that love you, said Jesus, what reward have ye? Ye must be perfect as your Father is perfect," and He loves things that are unlovely, and helps those who have no claim. In the nursery tale of Beauty and the Beast, we used to hear, though it passed without our notice, that until some one could love the monster in his ugliness, the spell would never pass; and there is a truth in that beyond the nursery. If any man is to do good amongst his fellows, he must have a heart for things unreformed and offensive; and the master power in Jesus Christ the Saviour is that when men were yet sinners, He died for them; and it is by that power that He still is making conquests.

Some of us have learned of that constraint, but some know nothing of it yet, and Jesus is waiting for the opportunity which will give Him access to the heart. He waits with His gifts and His goodwill, whilst the man wonders and delays and suspects. It is a glad day when reluctance is overcome, and a man consents to receive the grace of Christ in forgiveness.

2. But Paul also recognised the grace of his Lord in the fact that he had been called to service. "I thank Jesus Christ our Lord, who appointed me to His service, for that He counted me faithful, and He gave me strength for the trust." There is nothing in which Jesus stands so far apart from the common type of goodness as in this point of trust. He committed the fortunes of His cause into the hands of that group of timorous men who had run to hiding at the first breaking of the storm; to Peter, who had failed in spite of the most serious warnings, He gave the task of strengthening his brethren. And He did this, not with a half-humorous consent to make the best of bad material. He sent them to make disciples of all nations; they were to make their way, to persuade the heart of the world, to rear the fabric of a Church, to teach men, wise and unwise; and He left all that in the hands of men who had scattered in panic a few days before.

"The secret of education," says one, "is to make children believe they are capable of some good"; if you treat them as stupid, and allow them to think themselves stupid, you are fixing them where they

are. But our Lord has never condescended to ask less of a man than his best. Men are always slow to forget our failures; they watch a new beginner with the half-kindly, half-bitter pleasure of those who know that a few steps will bring him down. With men you never quite escape from your past; but so great is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that your past to Him is as dead, and He gives you work to do for Him, and expects you to do it well. In His first commission He gave no precise instructions as to what should and what should not be allowed in a Christian man. For that He threw the Apostles on themselves, and more than that, He believed that they would judge rightly. "What ye bind on earth," He said, "shall be bound in heaven." What a confidence that revealed in the moral instincts of a handful of unlettered men! And that is still going on. He finds a girl, light, gleeful, vain, but sound at heart, and He gives her a little child to bring up for Him. At first, she asks for counsel here and there, and gets little that is of much use; but in herself she grows under the charge, and becomes a woman, patient, self-forgetting, courageous, and in her sheltering heart her sons and daughters find a home. The work we do is commonly of small account in comparision with what the work does for us; and in the catalogue of our debts to Jesus Christ we must give a large place to the confidence He has shown in giving us rank as servants. "I thank Jesus Christ my Lord who set me to His service, for that He counted me faithful."

If we have in any measure realised our debt to Him, we shall wish to kindle in other hearts the fire which has begun to burn in our own. We should like to see the world at His feet, that those who have never loved Him may begin now, and that those who have loved Him long may love Him more; and we know that in all such movements of heart He is before and beyond us. The passion of the greatest lover of souls is nothing but a pale reflection of what burns in the heart of Jesus. We know that, and yet some of us stand back, uncertain of themselves, with a paralysing consciousness of their many unfitnesses. Many of Christ's people are living lives barren and unprogressive, because they will not receive this second grace, and gird themselves at His call to attempt His work.

3. Paul marks one other point in grace; "The grace of our Lord abounded in faith and love," he says. That means that grace goes on to affect character, which is a lesson some evangelicals have never learned. To them grace means nothing more than pardon; they ask for that in preaching, and they look for nothing more in their own life. In every Church there are people who fancy they have received of God what they sought, but they have not asked concerning the things which God seeks in them—the deepened understanding, the greater openness to truth, the increase of sympathy, hope, unselfishness. Conversion is not the only change in life. New decisions wait for every believing man, in which he will grow away

from what he was and become another man. "The whole business of a Christian man," it has been said, "is to become what he is." Implicitly, he is a good man, a man new born, who has died to sin and is risen with Christ. But that, it is pitifully clear, has only a kind of ideal truth, and our business is thus to become what we are, risen with Christ, and living in a new world of affections, and hopes, and desires, and capacities. And it often seems that no business could be harder, for the old things have not passed, and at every step we drag about with us the dead body of the former life. It is a situation to move the pity of our dear Lord, who has a heart for all tired creatures; and Paul tells us that Christ's kindness grew with His need, and that the Lord brought with Him the virtues which Paul could never of himself achieve. "His grace abounded with faith and love." If I have only a little faith, the world grows narrow and hopeless round about me; and yet if, with that little faith, I ask my Lord to come, He will come, and will bring a better faith, a more generous outlook on the world, a steadier will to do His will. If my heart is growing bitter, and it seems easier to love Christ whom I have not seen than men and women who are discourteous and offending, yet if I cry to my Lord, he will not refuse to come, and will bring love with Him. For in the heart where Jesus is, there will always be gentle and pleasant thoughts, and a wish to be of use, and a deep lying courage and assurance.

Grace, after all, is nothing else than God's mind to

give Himself to His creatures. It is the marvel of the world to see His own creatures so reluctant to admit the Creator, but He is not turned aside. "Where sin abounds, grace abounds more exceedingly," for God cannot be frustrated in the end. Grace is the last word in a world where the wisest man is the most deeply in God's debt. There is a look of prodigality in the sacrifice of Christ, and in our languid moods we do not seem to need all that He offers. A very little serves our turn. But there is no more of grace even in Jesus Christ than we require; and until for ourselves we have explored it in its wonder and variety, the giving heart of Christ is not content, and our natures are unblessed.

XII.

THE EXTENT OF FORGIVENESS.

"Wherefore am I come from Geshur? it were better for me to be there still."—2 Sam. xiv. 32.

HERE is an absolutely natural question which goes to its point, as children's questions often do. Without parade of theory, it grasps at what forgiveness, in its essential nature, is; for the demand is implied that pardon, if given at all, must be given out and out. There is no such thing as a half-forgiveness, either from God or from man; and those who propose to deal with an offence in that way are not showing kindness, they are guilty of an added wrong. As I said, there was no theorising about forgiveness; but Absalom was cloudily conscious of thoughts like these as he walked in disgrace about his father's capital. His fault had been condoned, his sentence mitigated; and now he was neither banished nor restored, but in a middle state, more irksome and intolerable than either. This is not forgiveness, he flashes out; it would have been honester to leave me frankly in exile.

He had struck his blow, and had accepted banishment without complaining. In Geshur, among his mother's people, he had a recognised rank; and whatever might be made of his crime at home, it was not likely to be urged against him where he had fled. "Revenge," says Bacon, "is a kind of wild justice"; sometimes we are impressed by the wildness of it, and sometimes by the essential justice. And Bacon goes on to admit that "the most tolerable sort of revenge is for those wrongs which there is no law to remedy"; and that was the character of Absalom's feud. A huge wrong had been done, and the law was helpless to set it right; and when Absalom struck at the man who had outraged his sister, the judgment of that hot Eastern world was that he did well. Revenge is a kind of wild *justice*, and in Geshur no one would count him disgraced by what he had done; the shame would have been if he had refused to prosecute his sister's quarrel. Thus he was free to live his life in exile without reminders of his deed. But when, under a mask of lenity, he was recalled to Jerusalem, he found his sentence waiting for him. He lived in the narrow limits of the city, but might not enter his father's house. He would be pointed at and pitied as one who had fallen from his station. He was a king's son, but without a place at court; he was an exile, but without the freedom which real exiles have; so what was offered as a grace was actually a heavier infliction than he had before. It is a bit of genuine

human fact, and, in an unconventional way, it raises the question of what forgiveness is.

I fear we must admit that much of our own forgiveness of injuries does not go past this point. We have been wronged, and our passions, which are always quick to take up our quarrel, make the wrong seem great, so that we put the offender from us as without excuse. Then come reflection and the softening influence of time. Friends interpose, and we are persuaded to make it up. The quarrel is over, but has forgiveness come? We cherish doubt of an old antagonist, and keep an eye upon him; and if at any time he treats us as before, we discharge upon him not merely the irritation due to his new offence, but a gathered irritation which comes from the old. We treat him not as a man who has wronged us once, but twice. Now, I admit that reasons may be urged for such behaviour, only we must not say that the first offence was forgiven; it was provisionally forgiven. You had ceased, for the time, to prosecute your quarrel, but you reserved the right to take it up again on any fit occasion. There is another side on which we have all approached these questions, for we have had experience of being forgiven, and in this case our eyes are sharper to discern the quality of things than in the other. When a man says he has forgiven, and makes us conscious all the time that he remembers, his measured politeness frets our temper like a wrong. We are no longer enemies, it seems, but certainly

we are not friends; and sometimes we have wished the old relation back again, when we were frankly at variance with each other; for anything must seem better than this ambiguous relation in which there is nothing of confidence, nor any real kindness. If we have been the victims of that most unkindly grace, we know, as Absalom did, that whatever else it may be, it is not forgiveness; for that makes an end of the offence, and restores the old relations in completeness.

If we keep our object-lesson still in view, we may be helped to take another step in the understanding of forgiveness. When Absalom asserted a claim as of right, the question might have been raised if he deserved to be forgiven. In many of the Old Testament stories you may observe a conflict of moral standards; and in this case the primitive notion of the right of private war, under which a man was left to maintain his own quarrel, was met by the later and nobler conception of public law, which interposes in the strife and restrains human passion. Absalom was a primitive creature, with his life in a world which the better men in Israel were leaving behind, the world of fierce, elemental passions and revenges. The sequel to his deed would have been an attempt, on the part of Amnon's kindred, to murder him, and so the blood feud would have continued in stroke and counter stroke, in generation after generation; and something was gained for the public peace when the law struck

in between the disputants, took revenge out of private hands, and banished the ill-doer. Now, when Absalom was recalled, a wrong to public justice was threatened. The king was thinking of what his fondness suggested, and not of what the general good required; for love's sake to a favourite son, he let him first come home, and then he gave him all he asked. And thus the common interest, which required the putting down of private feuds, was disregarded for the sake of a father's doating affection.

That is often seen in life. A boy, who has offended grossly, is borne with by a soft-hearted mother and sisters; he is pardoned whatever he does and whatever his mood, until he comes to take forgiveness as of course. The scandal and the sorrow and the disgust of his offence press day by day upon them, but him they never touch. He is not allowed to feel anything of the gravity of his fault; and the excess of their forbearance may actually hasten on his ruin. For one way in which men learn what their conduct is like is by feeling its results, and by seeing how it looks to others. What has seemed trivial or even unavoidable begins to change its face when they find it regarded by good men with abhorrence, for thus a dull conscience may be quickened; and a son, fenced from such wholesome knowledge by his mother's unrighteous fondness, may be confirmed in habits of self-excuse until his better life is gone. There is an unrighteous forgiveness, a forgiveness which has only kindness

and good nature in it, and it never tends to goodness. Love contains an element of strictness and even sternness; however we define them, it is clear that there are moral conditions attached to forgiveness, the chief of which is a real repentance. Absalom wished that his father should bear the whole burden of his pardon, nothing was to come on his shoulders. He had no change of mind to exhibit, no security to give of better conduct in the future; it was nothing to him that the public law had been broken, the securities of the common peace invaded, he wanted back, and that should be enough.

I fear that sometimes in our thoughts of the divine forgiveness we err at the same point. It seems so natural that on God's great heart the whole burden should be laid. "God will pardon me," said Heine near the end, "that is His business." Well, I think it is clear that a forgiveness which is all on one side, which makes demands upon the offended and not upon the offender, a forgiveness which does not require a real repentance, first or last, is an immoral act. No man need hope from God for a pardon which will ask nothing of him; and if he could get it, it would be to his injury. There is in God at all times an infinite willingness to forgive, and He works on men in order that He may be able to forgive. His mercy is unbought. It is the first fact, and it does not wait for any change or movement in the human heart. But the sentence of pardon, that final and irreversible sentence after which there is no con-

demnation, waits upon a resolution of our will. A forgiveness which has no better reason than kind-heartedness, which does not take account of the great interests of righteousness, is not a benefit, but a hurt to a man, whether it be thought of as coming from God or from a neighbour.

But having said that, I must leave my text, or speak of it only by way of contrast. In David was found this half-hearted and really immoral forgiveness, which went only as far as it dared, though that, as his conscience told him, was further than it ought; but what of God? By what measures is He restrained in His pardons, which are all righteous? The Psalmist has many companions in exclaiming, "Oh, the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven!" For however sour and ungenial are the pardons of men, with God there are no half measures. When He pardons, He pardons out and out, so that a burden is taken off the heart at once. If we would know, for our guidance, what forgiveness may be, we must study it not in men, with their reservations and suspicions and delays, but in God. "I, even I, am He that blotteth out your transgressions for Mine own sake, and I will not remember your sins." "I have blotted out as a thick cloud your iniquities, and as a cloud your sins; return to Me, for I have redeemed you." That is the message of the Cross of Christ to all who take their past as now beyond recall. If you "return" to a man who says he has forgiven you, you are apt to be reminded of your fault; but God bids

you return, because with Him, at least, you will find your sin forgotten. There is no stinting in His favour, no reserve in His familiarity, no accommodation in His demand. Some people are always reminding a man of his lack of education; in an obtrusive way they suit their conversation to his poor wits, pausing to explain that Queen Anne is dead, lest he should not happen to have heard; and he resents their condescension as an insult. Some men never trust you after a single failure, and in the smallness of the things they leave in your hands, they betray their distrust. But God? He accosts a man who that very day has turned his heart from evil, and He lays on him the whole burden of the duty of a Christian man. He never says to any, You are too young in goodness to be taken seriously; He says, "Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect." The old life has not died out of you with its flagrant derelictions, but of that He makes no account. It was only yesterday that you were untrue, and made through cowardice some great refusal, and to-day He meets you with a task for which the bravest might be unfit. "I will not remember your sins," He says. I do not know anything in God's grace more astonishing than this unwarranted trust in weak men, and Isaiah betrays the same feeling. "I will make mention of the loving-kindnesses of the Lord," he says, "and His great goodness to the house of Israel. For God said, Surely they are My people, children who will not be false." That seemed to the prophet

to be the very masterpiece of God's goodness. He does not remember our sins: when He pardons, He pardons out and out. And the fruit of that is seen in what Jesus tells, that in His kingdom there are last who come to be first. Men, who start with all the likelihoods against them, yet make way and come to the front, because they have been forgiven much, and because God, against whom they sinned, is willing to trust them. Do not carry human analogies of conduct in these matters over to God, and do not shrink from confession and forgiveness, because men often make that task so odious. For until you have come to God about them, you will never really be done with your offences.

One trouble is that people stop half-way. With God, as I have said, there is no hanging on probation, no life under surveillance before forgiveness can be granted; the difficulty is with us. Many people are willing, under the quieting influence of years, to quit their rebellion, and submit to the restraints of godly custom, but they ask for nothing more; they are content not to see the King's face, but to dwell in a remote and sobering vagueness of religious feeling. Is that all that God intends? "If you, with all your faults," said Jesus, "know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more does your Father know?" If our poor human copy of fatherhood is incomplete, and, indeed, worthless without familiarity, if a family life seems spoiled where there is nothing more than dutiful regard, how much more would God's household

be from Whom every fatherhood in heaven and earth is named? That reserve in our relations with Him, which asks little and expects little, is a wrong done to the heart of our Father. He will be taken at His word; and when He says, I have forgiven, He wishes that we should have boldness in His presence. We must get beyond the seeming moderation but the real unkindness of the Prodigal's petition—"Make me as one of thy hired servants." It is good to be even a servant in God's house; but if you might be a son, the stinted prayer is an essential rejection of what God is offering. If you had been born outside, it would be much to come to be a servant; but since you are a son, you cannot sink to be merely a servant without denying your Father and frustrating His hope for you.

And it is also a wrong to yourself. God made us not to live in a decent isolation, with remote and dutiful recognitions of Him at fit times, but to live and move and have our being in Him. "Human nature was made," says Newman Smyth, "not to be a little bustling independency of God, but to dwell in God and God in it"; and a great part of our being cannot find its meaning short of that. There is something of Christ in all men, gifts of suffering and of service, of apprehension of the truth and of advance in character which will never be discovered if we keep apart from God. You may round off your life without Him, but it will be a shallower and less beneficent life than it was meant to be—"a little bustling independency";

and it might have been a part of His great kingdom, enriched by gifts of His, and ruled in all things by His will. Forgiveness never can stop half-way; and He who has sent to you the assurance of His pardon, intends by that that you should come out of your isolation and your dimness into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

XIII.

HIS MARVELLOUS LIGHT.

"The praises of Him who called you out of darkness to His marvellous light."—1 Pet. ii. 9.

PLUTARCH, in one place, describes the mental experience of a man in giving himself up to the influence of a religious mystery. These mysteries in Greece were of the nature of sacraments, making appeal to the imagination, and conveying the deep truths of religion by means of symbol. No doubt, as amongst ourselves, there were varying degrees of apprehension among the initiated, but what Plutarch records must stand as a witness of what was possible for a devout soul. "First come wanderings and wearisome mazes," he says, "fearful passings through darkness, and before the end, terrors manifold, shudderings, fear, sweat, amazement. And forth from this a light that comes to meet you, pure places and meadows that receive you, songs and dances and holy apparitions." That is an experience curiously parallel to what Paul speaks of when he tells us that "God, who bade the light shine out of darkness, has shined in my heart, showing me the face of Jesus Christ,

and lighting up my heart with a sense of how glorious God is." Darkness first, black as if there never had been day, through which I groped in vague, empty places, with no cheering touch of a hand: but then, at a favoured hour, there came the gladness and the wonder of the light. "Wanderings," says Plutarch, "and endless passings through the dark, and shudderings of fear; but after these there came not the justification of my alarms, but a light to meet me, pure places and meadows to receive me, songs and dances and holy apparitions." For in this high business of religious experience, men "come not to blackness and darkness and tempest, but to the city of the living God, to the festal host of angels and the Church of the first-born." That is what we have to tell of, says Peter, the wonderfulness of God who called us out of darkness to His marvellous light.

1. Let me speak of how God seems to bring men into the dark. For what had Peter, in his nature, to do with darkness? He was a blunt, choleric fisherman, with none of the uncertainties and depression of the student; a man of the open air, prompt in resolve, simple in feeling, sound and clean in heart, he stood well out of the shadows. He had no vicious life to abandon or to deplore, for, before he knew Jesus, he was already so eager in his love of the highest as to have left wife and work to give himself to this concern. What should such a man know of uncertainty and groping and fear? Yet one incident is on record which shows how even upon him the power of

the dark asserted itself. At the miraculous fishing, when the sense of God was forced upon him, he cried, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." That is the cry of the human heart when it shrinks from God's presence as unendurable, and seeks to hide. "Terrors manifold," says Plutarch, "and shudderings and fear and sweat and amazement." Isaiah tells how one day when he was a youth, blinded by the tidings of the death of Uzziah, the magnificent, he had strayed into the Temple, and there, in a vision, he found himself in the presence of a mightier King. "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and I heard the seraphim crying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of Hosts; the fulness of all the earth is His glory. And the foundations of the house were moved at the voice of him that cried, and *the house was filled with smoke.*" He enjoyed, that is, one moment of clear vision, but then the darkness came rushing in. "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; for I, a man of unclean lips, have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." That is, in another age, Peter's cry of, Depart from me, and in another faith, it is Plutarch's "terrors manifold, and shudderings and amazement." It is the confession of human weakness and fault when confronted with the divine magnificence, for the first effect of that is not light but gloom. A man feels that he cannot look at what thus passes knowledge, that he cannot worship where his ignoble ways are thus discovered. He is afraid, and would fain stand afar off.

But it is well to remember that this darkness is due to the approach of light. Our dreams, with all their incident and adventure, belong to the borderland, where sleep is loosening its chains from off us, and our spirits are awaking from their lethargy. We struggle against mountainous oppressions, we swim for life in tossing seas, we grope despairingly along unending caverns, and the explanation is that a new day is calling us, and our senses are struggling to awake. It is not otherwise with this despairing darkness of the soul, which, hard as it is to bear, is felt at all because the light is breaking in and the soul is already half awake. A man has been lying stupid and supine, without a qualm or struggle, but now, in his dull sense, the voice of God is sounding, and terrors and shame take hold of him. When he hears better he will change his mood, but now he is only on the way.

It is the awakening sense of God that makes a man aware of his fault; he is bitterly and despairingly conscious that he is not good because he is on his way to be better. If any one, upon some other day, had questioned Bartimæus as to what he desired, the answer would have been trivial and free from all emotion, for he needed bread and money and a hand to guide him across the street, things which had no touch of miracle upon them. But when, with the rumour of Christ's passing, the chance of healing had come close, these common needs were pushed aside by a sudden torturing sense of deprivation; the one

matter which engaged him now was this, "Lord, that I may receive my sight!" In that moment he felt more of the bitterness of being blind than in all the years before. With the energy of his nature he protested against it, and the reason was that Jesus of Nazareth, ill known and yet carrying with Him some possibility of eyesight, was actually there. The sullen acquiescence in what had grown familiar and a means of livelihood vanished, and instead, there appeared this imperious demand, for the nearness of light made the persistent darkness seem an outrage.

2. But God who brings us into the dark also calls us out of it, and those who speak of the excellences of God have much to say of how, when their hearts were bitter because of their ill-doing, they were met with a loving sentence of pardon. "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, who retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy?" In heaven they ever sing praise to "Him who loves us, and who loosed us from our sins."

There are temperaments, and there have been schools of religion so mastered by the sense of the holiness and majesty of God that any movement towards confidence has been impossible; and many good men and women have never passed beyond the stage of the terrors manifold, and the shudderings and fear. They have no expectation of seeing the light come to meet them until they have passed through death. There they abide, fingering their motives and detailing their besetting sins, craving forgiveness

always, and never rejoicing, with free hearts, in the forgiveness which is assured. That is not our Lord's will concerning His children. When we fall, He would not have us lie prostrate, bemoaning our stumbling feet; He wants us to be up and on, hopeful even with our faults since they are under sentence. "We believe in the forgiveness of sins," and He encourages us to do a fuller justice to His redemption than by this attitude of prostration. Jesus is not merely gentle to troubled men, He is the Lord; and with an authority which requires obedience He says to all penitent creatures, "Go into peace"; and if we do not go, our sullen and stagnant humours are no mark of grace, they are a real offence to Jesus Christ.

Charles Lamb once wrote to Coleridge, "Cultivate simplicity, or rather I should say, banish elaborateness, for simplicity springs spontaneous from the heart"; and the precept deserves a high place in Christian preaching. To get rid of subtleties, to take Christ at His word, and leaving yourself and your past and your present in His hands, whilst you settle all your thought upon doing His will in the world, that is the homage which He requires. He meant His religion to be a homely thing, with joy and lightness in it. The playing of children was no interruption to His talk. The one ceremony which He enjoined upon the disciples was scarcely a ceremony,—the common food, the familiar drink, a friendly meal with a special consecration; as if to say, that whenever His friends meet and eat and talk together, their fellowship should

leave them in a mood of thankful remembrance of new gifts received. That is where the Church began; and whenever faith is reawakened, something of that artlessness recurs. Faith is not the acceptance of mysteries at which the intellect is staggered, it is the joyful confidence that we have a merciful God. That is the character of the new covenant, a trustful, child-like attitude towards a God who may be known. Why should we not trust Him, when He has shown us His heart? In olden days He was hedged about with awe, and men's approaches to Him were timorous and doubtful; but "the Word became flesh, and dwelt amongst us full of grace in all its trueness—grace which was nothing else than grace." Jesus came to our level and made Himself familiar, and He said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

This is a matter on which we must deal plainly with ourselves. In our world there is much that makes for gloom,—sickness and care and sin; and we need to remind ourselves that God has called us out of the darkness, and that we have no right to continue accusing and bemoaning ourselves. "Who shall lay anything," says Paul, "to the charge of God's elect? It is *Christ* that died,"—a great death, in which there is provision for you and me and all the world of men. And thus our duty is to set our faces towards the light, and to treat our oppressions as belonging to the evil past. "The darkness is passing away," says John, "and the true light, which means confidence and joy and rest, is already shining.".

3. But forgiveness, great as it is, is not the last word of God, "who by His only-begotten Son (all mercies in one sovereign mercy!) has redeemed you from the evil ground, and has willed you to be born out of darkness but into light, out of death but into life, out of sin but into righteousness" (Coleridge). There is a Christian experience which stops at the mere article of escape, an experience which is altogether negative; but, strictly, that does not deserve the name of Christian. For in Christian faith and Christian experience and Christian morals, the negative has always the positive in view. A right disciple is not so much one who has no faults, as one who possesses some quality; he is not content to be good, but seeks to be good for something. To converted thieves Paul said, It is not enough that you should no longer live at the expense of your neighbours, you must go to work, that so you may have to give to him who needs. It is not enough, he says to others, that you have cleansed your tongues, so that you now can talk without offence, you have still to learn to speak in such a way as to minister a grace to those who hear, making them gladder and wiser and stronger men. Christian character is all made up of positives, and Christian experience, matching that, is not toneless and colourless. It comes adding sunshine to the daylight, for friendship, and duty, and success, and the earth's beauty are all irradiated for a believing man. God's purpose for us is that we should walk in a light that is marvellous,

a light which has pleasure in it. It is not always high water with any man, for all have their seasons of ebb tide, when feeling flags; and yet if we know nothing of this marvellous light, our religion is shallow indeed.

Alford bids us think more of the aim of the call than of its immediate result, for he thinks the rendering should rather be "to the light" than "into" it. More is contained in the call than we have known as yet; there is an element of the unfulfilled, something which God intends. There is a light before us, and God has called us to that. A word like "marvellous" must look for its interpretation not to dictionaries but to experience. "To know Christ," says Melanchthon, "is to know the benefits which He brings with Him"; and so this knowledge can come to us only by experience. Paul, in the end, was able to say, "To me to live is Christ," for He seemed to enter into everything, giving it savour and intensity, and nothing could be profitless since He was in it. I was once frustrated in a plan I had of preaching in Bithynia, he could say, but it was the Spirit of Jesus that suffered me not, and when I had wandered disconsolate down to the coast, I got my summons into Europe; so the shut door forced me to turn to a door that was open. I ran against a man who strained my patience and nearly broke my heart, the scandal and the despair of his decent friends; but when I looked again, I saw "my poor brother, for whom Christ died." And so in

everything Jesus changed for me the quality of my experience; and nothing now is base, nothing desperate, nothing without meaning. It is a happy and wonderful destiny this of a Christian man; and though for most of us the heights are still unscaled, we must loyally follow on, if haply we may apprehend that for which we were apprehended by Christ Jesus—who called us to His own marvellous light.

XIV.

CHRIST THE OUTLAW.

"And there came a scribe, and said unto Him, Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have lodging-places; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head."—MATT. viii. 19, 20.

THIS is one of the texts which, unless we watch ourselves, we are sure to interpret in the light of Western conditions. In our unkindly climate, no lot is so pitiful as that of the houseless; and amongst all the cruelties which night covers in a great city, there is none so intolerable to the imagination as the case of the haggard figures who shiver through the dark under a railway arch, or seek uneasy slumber on a bench in some park. We are a people so long settled under roofs that we have almost lost the wild instinct of the open air and the bare sky, and there is for us a peculiar shadow of disrepute lying on the houseless man. These things are in our mind when we hear these verses read, and we are apt to find in them, first of all, a hint of privation and exposure; and as soon as that is allowed entrance, there follows the suggestion on the part of Jesus, of something like

self-pity, as if He said,—look, how discomfortable is My lot, and you must face the same if you are to follow Me! Now there is substantial delusion in that quarter. Galilee is not Britain in climate, and the whole attitude of the East to life out of doors is different from ours. When Jesus called a man to leave his house and come out to the open, He was asking for what was the merest commonplace of the religious life. For any one who wished to find his soul the way was clear; he needed only take his staff and cloak, and go out to the desert to be alone in the silence with God, and neither his friends nor he himself would waste a thought on the physical discomfort. The saints of the East were all houseless, and this man, if he meant seriously by religion, must have been prepared for such a demand.

What, then, did the answer mean? Jesus never was distrustful of emotion, and we might have expected Him to give a special welcome to this man, who, forgetting the customary caution of his class, was pledging himself to follow an unknown teacher whithersoever he might go. Something of nobility there was in that, no doubt, but two elements of misunderstanding were also present which Jesus wished to correct. A man may be entirely sincere in the temper in which he approaches the Lord, and yet he may be unduly aware of the worth of what he is bringing. This man was a lawyer, a man of position and education, and in throwing in his lot with this group of peasants and fishermen he felt

that he had a contribution to bring, and he received the answer which suited his mood. My cause, said Jesus in effect, is rooted on the hillsides and the desert, it is a thing fundamentally irregular; and the help which you might give in managing a city or tinkering a constitution is wasted on us. The answer is a vehement declaration that Jesus and His friends do not depend on the countenance and the wisdom of men to bear them out; if they prosper it must be in virtue of what they find in the desert with God, not of what they can collect of respectability and patronage from the city. That is one element, and the other lies near it. Jesus declared for this man, and past him for all men, what kind of cause it is which He had proposed to make His own. Luke is probably right in setting this incident later in our Lord's career than Matthew does, for it suggests the mood of the period, when experience had brought sadness to His spirit. "I speak in parables," He said in these later days, "that hearing they may not understand." Originally the purpose had been different, for He sought by parable to make His message not only simple but delightful, that thus their attention might be arrested from the first. But He missed His mark; and, as the end drew on, He was driven to confess that what He had done to make His meaning clear had only served to bewilder and perplex. I have adorned My teaching to make it living, and yet they do not understand. That is the mood of our text. You wish to join My cause? Well, I shall tell you

what kind of cause it is. Every creature of God's making finds its nook somewhere, even creatures which men count noxious; but for Me and Mine there is no place, not a hole in the hillside, not a branch on the tree. It ought not to be needful to explain that, when Jesus said that, He was not thinking of His happy nights under the stars, He meant that He was "a religious outlaw," suspected wherever He came, and driven on by men who felt His presence a disturbance. They did not know how to classify Him, and that is always an annoyance to men whom custom rules. He was a teacher of religion, who was not religious as they understood the term. In the Temple, for example, He could not acquiesce in the forms and conventions which other men accepted. Anna and Simeon and their pious successors were not shocked by the din and babel of the Temple courts; they slipped through the crowd to their familiar corner and smilingly went home again with happy thoughts of God. But this youth from Nazareth found everything provided for within the walls except the chance of meeting God, and His voice rang out in loud protest at that tremendous omission. In the Synagogues again there was an established rule as to how matters should be ordered—prayer and praise, reading and some word of exhortation, and it exactly fitted most of those who came; but as they pored over the pages of the Old Testament, this man startled them by saying, "Ye search the Scriptures because in them ye think that ye have eternal life, and ye will not

come unto Me that ye may have life," as if to say that their godly tradition of worship did not attain its end. So there was no place in Temple or Synagogue for Him, and peace-loving people looked askance at One whose whole view of religion was different from that which they had learned. Frequently in the Gospels we find Jesus speaking out on what was considered the less religious side of a question. "The Sabbath was made for man," He said, and He refused, at the bidding of the stricter party, to blame those who walked in the fields and pulled the ears of corn as they passed. "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day," and He did not care whether the good in question were of the kind which the Church approved or not. The rule of Corban was a fair example of how a mistaken piety may run athwart the plainest moral duty. A man might throw his money away in costly sacrifices and vows, and then plead exemption from the obligation to support his parents, just as girls to-day give their Church meetings as a reason for not sticking to work they do not like. Of course, the thing was not put bluntly; there was a glamour over it, and no one liked to speak out against what had an air of peculiar piety, and had the sanction of the Church. But this man tore the void away, and showed the thing as it was; "ye make void the word of God by your tradition, and many such things ye do."

He was a religious outlaw, and no one who wished to sleep at night would have liked Jesus to settle in

his quarter. He had not come to bring peace but a sword, and wherever He came, He said, there was likely to be division. My word is a principle of unsettlement; and you, a lawyer, reverent of all that is fixed, moving always amongst precedents, you say that you will follow whithersoever I go. Man, you do not know what you are undertaking! I suppose that in the crowds which gathered there were sons and daughters out of very orthodox homes, and, as they listened, their minds were agreeably stimulated. There were prickings of new ideas, there was a sense of novelty and space; religion, which had grown formal in the synagogue, had here a curious awe of reality and nearness. They felt that, and I daresay that it did them good; just as when young people, strictly reared, steal over at times to hear a heretic. But they go back to their Catechism! "God enlargeth a nation and straiteneth it again"; minds are tempted out to smell the air and see the blue water, but if they creep back into their prison there is little gained.

Jesus wished this man to realise that in Him men have to do with a new thing, and that if they took a scrap of the new to patch the old where it had grown ragged, they would have nothing but disappointment. There must be an entirely new garment, said Jesus, an altered plan and scheme of existence, and unless you are willing to go with Him on that understanding you will never stick by Him to the end, It is easy to join the Christian society, but to be a Christian is a different matter. The moral standards of Jesus are

not those which govern the Christian society, and the religion of Jesus is not merely the religion of the Church of Jesus. The religion of the Church has always something of the nature of compromise; it is an endeavour to secure that the Son of man shall have where to lay His head. Ecclesiastes, with his precept, "Be not righteous overmuch," has come to edit parts of the New Testament; and the Church is fairly at home in the world. But it is not less true that a Christian in the great sense is still a man of whom many are impatient. He is living for big things, and the host of those who are content with small things are restive and uncomfortable in his society, since they suspect that inwardly he condemns them. His motives are sure to be misunderstood, and his mistakes magnified. His nobility will be smiled away as quixotism, his aloofness from what is doubtful as pharisaism, his patience with the bad as ignorance of the world. If, as is most likely, Christ's servant holds to his way, he may raise a clamour against himself, as His master did, and be counted not more but less religious than his neighbours. Going after Christ always must mean keeping a mind of your own and eyes of your own; it means refusing to accept as true what idle men have agreed to accept; it means a course of resolute nonconformity. It is not to choose once and be converted, as people say, for many choices have to be made after the first, and at any one of these it is possible still to come to terms. "If they had been mindful of that place whence they came out, they

would have had opportunity to return." The land you left is not hundreds of miles or a score of years away, you may return to it now by a single concession in the name of prudence and common sense.

The Church is possessed by a morality which is essentially selfish and worldly; there is a religion of churchgoing and pious phrases and forms, which makes no demands on those who hold to it. It is easy to find where to lay one's head; the shame is that so few of us ever dream that it might be difficult. But Jesus knew it, and He would like us all, for our own good, to know it. For His religion is the religion of the new covenant. When He found people like us trying to keep the fresh emotion and the fresh joy in the forms of the old convention, He compared them to a stingy peasant who puts the raw, new wine into an old, stiffened skin. It is old, but it will do, and it saves expense. But does it? said Jesus, and He pointed to the torn skin and the spilt wine for an answer. That way of yours for keeping religion at the minimum of trouble is an excellent plan for losing both old and new.

But now let me speak of the misunderstanding which I mentioned first. This man, not knowing Jesus or His mind aright, might easily imagine that he had something to bring, and that the young community would be enriched by his presence, There is no commoner attitude, and it is the beginning of all kinds of difficulties in the Church. People wish to be taken at their own valuation. If they are well off,

they expect notice; if they have done work, they expect to be thanked for it; if they are clever or educated, they ask that the preaching should be adapted to their taste; and, unfortunately, the Church has often justified that attitude, and has given men a place for no higher reason than a worldly one. Faber says ferociously of his own Roman communion, "How many are thought to be invaluable men and pillars of the Church, not because they are supernatural men and in God's secrets, but because they have the world's ear and represent its influential classes!" And again he says, "Your prudence is successful, but in what? Does anybody love Jesus better? Is there a poor soul saved somewhere? Oh no! but the Ministry of the day have been got to drop a condescending word about the Pope!" That speaks home to all communions, for they all are elated about things of worldly consequence. Some so-called Christians would be appreciably less sure of Christianity, if well-dressed people did not come to their Church; and there is a clear note of satisfaction in the tone with which men name over prime ministers and leaders of science who have said patronising things about the Christian faith. We have come a long way in that from the place which Paul held when he said that "not many wise men, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God chose the foolish things of this world that He might put to shame them that are wise, and God chose the weak things of the world that He might put to shame the

things which are strong; and the base things of the world and the things that are despised did God choose, yea, and the things that are not, that he might bring to naught the things that are, that no flesh should glory before God." Ah me! I fear that in His Church we all are taking things of the flesh as if they did count before God,—numbers, and rank, and wealth, and reputation; and so long as we do that, we shall not know our real resource.

In this answer of our Lord's we hear a note of jealousy for the character of the Church which He was founding. It was not, in His eyes, a stronger or more reputable thing because of the accession of one or of fifty scribes. It is not stronger if great men come, or weaker if they stand aside, for it derives its strength from a deeper source. When the king of Sodom offered Abraham his spoils, he got the answer, "I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread, or a shoe-latchet, or anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abraham rich." He knew something of what Sodom was; he knew what stains were on that wealth, and he was content to be just as rich or as poor as God appointed. There is a grand jealousy in that for a good man's name; and Jesus, knowing how men have always run after names, and rank, and education, and knowing just how much these things are worth, was jealous for His Church. Dark days of ambiguous policy lay before it, and times in which its character as a spiritual institution was like

to disappear; at least, He was resolved that it should start clear, resting simply upon truth and God.

This gospel of Jesus Christ, in its pureness, is a thing suspected, unwelcome, heretical. "We know," said the Roman Jews to Paul,—"we know concerning this sect that everywhere it is spoken against," and that is likely to be still its destiny. But being such, it is an infinitely strong and self-sufficing thing. It asks no countenance from men, it is discouraged by no frowns of authority, it makes suit for no fostering care, but takes its own way helped by unseen supplies. Is that the character of the Church you wish to hold to—the invisible Church of Jesus Christ? Or is that the kind of life you wish to live, leaning on His strength and prospering in His way? "His wisdom," says James Strachan, "needs no supplement from our compliance. All tricks of policy, all compromises with error, all silence through fear of consequence, so far from assisting God, are hindrances which He has to overcome before He can help and save us." That is how Jesus thought of His Church, and it is only men who are willing to come in on these terms whom He even wishes on His side. The victory which He desires and which waits a little further on, is to be clear from all compliance.

XV

THE MINISTRY OF THE NAIL AND THE GOAD.

"The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails well fastened. The masters of assemblies gave them from the One Shepherd." —Eccles. xii. 11.

IT is pretty clear that the last verses (9–14) do not belong to the original book, which ends as it began with the mournful cry, "All is vanity." The writer has ranged over a wide surface of experience, but has made no inch of progress. Perhaps that is the providential function of his book, to report on certain paths in life as closed. I tried the way of pleasure, and of ambition, and of learning, so he reports, and they led me to nothing; and then, in a burst of infinite sadness, he cries, "think of God when you still are young, and do not wait, as I have done, until you have no heart to begin."

Such a book was bound to awaken questions as to its right to a place in the Canon of Scripture. Devout people did not find in it what they were accustomed to look for in the Bible; it did not steady faith or help towards worship, why, then, should it be there? Wise men, coming after, added these notes of

commendation, in which, with varying degrees of insight, they tell what this perplexing book seemed to them to say; and far the shrewdest and most penetrating of these notes is the suggestion of our text, that the book was meant to play the part of a gadfly stinging dull minds awake. God gives us words like goads as well as words like nails, words which provoke the mind to activity as well as words which make men, in their mortal frailty, already sharers in the rest of God. "The masters of assemblies gave them both from the One Shepherd," for there is a divine office of stimulation. That is, surely, a credible apology. Most of us have, at some time, acknowledged the power of provocation in human speech. It is said of Latimer that "he spake nothing but it left certain pricks and stings in the hearts of his hearers"; and Cicero reports of Pericles, that great Athenian, that he sought to leave stings in the minds of those who heard. He was not satisfied that men should go away content with having heard, he wanted them to go to do something, and he planted words in their memory of so irritating a quality that they could not be neglected. That we understand of human eloquence, and this man pleads that God also has a use for words which provoke to thought.

If God makes use both of words which stir the mind and words which steady it, we may be sure that you and I have need of both. One of the greatest of awakening preachers—Hofacker—said of himself that he doubted if his preaching would tell

for more than two years in one place. People become accustomed to the sharp, searching tone, and it ceases to affect them. And that is no less true of an unbroken ministry of confirmation; under its influence questions may be suffered to sleep which *ought* sometimes to be agitated, and even parts of a man's moral being may be asleep, so that, if he worships or serves God at all, it is with a fractional service, and God wants the whole man. "There are," says Harnack, "resting and rest-giving elements in the proclamation of Jesus, but there are also impelling and inflaming elements," and, for our spiritual health, we need to keep a place for both.

1. Let me speak of the ministry of the nail,—"the resting and rest-giving elements" in God's message. To believe, to believe in God—that is the great word both of Old Testament and of New. The representative figure is Abraham, who was ever a wanderer and a homeless man, exposed to perpetual hazard, and seeming when he died to be no nearer a settlement than when he left his home in Ur; and yet it is said of him that he believed God, and that he died in faith. Through all his wandering and frustration something kept his mind steady, and he died as he had lived, perfectly sure that he had done well in trusting God. John tells a story of a nobleman who came for help for his dying boy. Many of us have passed that way, and they know the temper in which such hours are put through,—a temper part of flurry and part of despair, when a man is impatient to do something,

anything, and at once, and in a moment he feels that it is of no use. All who have shared in that experience will appreciate the marvel of this nobleman's behaviour. Jesus said to him, "Go thy way, thy son liveth; and the man believed the word which Jesus had spoken to him, and he went his way." All his despairing panic was at rest. His boy and he himself seemed to have passed abruptly out of their own keeping, with all the agitation and turmoil which that involved, into the hands of One absolutely able and absolutely kind. What need was there of words? why should he wait to ask for pledges? "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee."

In this world of clamorous egotism no lesson is harder to learn. It seems essential to assert ourselves, and it is never easy to let the management of life pass into other hands. The heart knows its own bitterness and its own burden. A man very early learns that no one but himself can fully understand what gain at a particular point means to him; there are conditions about it, intimate secrets of feeling which he cannot explain. No doubt there might be loftier objects of desire, or objects more wisely chosen, but this is what holds his mind for the time, so that he would be a rich man in his feeling if he could get it, and a very poor and sorry man if he lost it. But just because no one can understand our feeling about things, we the more stubbornly clutch at the reins which guide our life. Faith is difficult, both because

we are so great in our own esteem and because we are so little; the world stretches away on every side a featureless wilderness of human life, with the unseeing heavens arching over it, and it seems presumptuous to ask anything for oneself, or to expect that such a prayer will be heard. That is where revelation meets men, for it is the discovery to distrustful hearts of a care and an understanding which are absolute. David said, "It is Thy gentleness that makes me great." Amidst the bewildering vastness and perplexity of life, there was borne in upon him the certainty that God really had a care for him, and singled him out from amongst his fellows, and spoke home to his very heart. That made a man of him; and it was easy for him to cast his burden upon such a God.

But the difficulties of faith are stubborn, and God had other pledges and assurances for His creatures than the saints of the Old Covenant had known. In the fulness of time, when faith was doubly hard, One was seen who took it as His peculiar office upon earth to stand by all unfriended people. He was unprosperous and misconstrued; He grew old before His time, and to those who watched, it seemed as if He actually heaped upon His own shoulders the burdens which He lifted off others. No infliction was withheld, for He had set no limit to His service, and everything that was due to men He took upon Himself. At first it was hard for men to realise the meaning of such a life; but, in a while, the secret was discovered by some one, and it passed, in awestruck whispers, from

lip to lip. "We have seen, and bear witness," says John, "that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; and we beheld His glory, the glory of the Only-begotten of the Father." So in this man of Nazareth they saw, and all the ages after them have seen, not man but God, — God, showing what is in His heart, God declaring His love towards us. Paul reads the lesson of that revelation for every distrustful mind, "If He spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, surely He will also with Him give us all things freely." Dr. John Duncan said of himself, "I have a great deal of fear in my composition"; and many Christian people, if they were candid, would say the same. They are willing to believe in God's goodwill; but at the same time they would like to watch how He manages, lest He should take away something which they count essential. They believe, but not with all their heart. And the only remedy for that temper is to look more and more at the things outside of you; look at the wounds of Christ, and learn there the mind of God.

What people need in preaching is the broad and joyful proclamation that we have a merciful God. Many are groping about amongst explanations, whilst what they need is the fact. Dr. Dale, in one of his letters, contrasts Moody's preaching in 1883 with what it was in 1875. "He was just as earnest, vigorous, impressive as before, and hundreds went

into the inquiry-room every night. But the results were inconsiderable. I have seen none of the shining faces that used to come to me after his former visit. In 1875 he exulted in the free grace of God—a grace which was to lead men to repentance in the sense of a complete change of life, and his joy was contagious. Men leaped out of darkness unto light, and lived a Christian life afterwards. The 'do-penance preaching' has had no such results." That is a notable witness as applied to a man with so astounding a record in gospel preaching; it means that the more simply these "rest-giving elements" can be presented, the more powerful and the more welcome they will be; and the intrusion of even a little of what might, at other times, be wholesome, may blunt its edge. These rest-giving elements are altogether connected with what is in God, His thought, His purpose, His work, and not with any feelings or decisions of ours. Many people in this world are, like Bunyan, labouring under a burden. He calls it sin; our Scots song says, "A body's sel's the sairest wecht"; the load of yourself, the guidance of your fortune, the making good of what is past — it is a sore charge. And men need to be told in some convincing way of what God is, so that with a good heart they may lay their burden down. "We that believe," says the Apostle, "do enter into rest." A man trusts God and is content.

2. But now of the ministry of the goad. In the Church of Jesus, with all its faults and its deep

disgrace, there has been a pretty continuous record of progress. There has been growth in doctrine; one by one, the great evangelical ideas have come to their rights in thought and in preaching. To-day we are able so plainly to discern them in the New Testament that we wonder how it was possible, through centuries, not to see them. But Athanasius, Augustine, Anselm, Abelard, Luther, Wesley—each in turn made something, which had been in the past, obsolete and impossible. There has been growth in conscience,—a continuous education in regard to the rights of other men, so that if, in the Church of to-day, we have less of formal piety, we have immensely more of the sense of obligation and the willingness for sacrifice. It is strange to think that men, believers and lovers of Jesus, were through long ages content that most of the world should live and die in ignorance of Him. Such facts as these tell us of the working of God's Spirit in His Church,—a Spirit which quickens and enlarges and renews, which shows "the things of Christ" to each new generation, translating the eternal, timeless thing into the dialect and the duty of the day. There is a living Spirit of emancipation sent to lead us into all the truth and into all duty, and this ministry of the goad is peculiarly an instrument of the Holy Spirit.

There is a deal of laziness in man which inclines him to resent anything like a new idea or even a fresh presentation of an old one; and yet it is certain that God's message cannot be received in its fulness

except by a moving and travelling mind. It is impossible to impart an idea to a mind which is merely passive. A guide may take you to some point of vantage, but it is you who must see the view. The activity of eye and mind is needed, as they range over the outspread world of sea and hill, distinguishing distance from distance, noting the creeping shadow of the clouds, the curl of smoke above a hidden hamlet, the sudden gleam where the sun lights up the bracken; it is thus alone that you can see what is before you, and if your mind is sodden, with no outlook beyond the pavement, it was needless for you to climb so far. We must stir up ourselves (and the whole of ourself, for it is the whole man that thinks) to meet an idea. We must lay hold of it with such mental instruments as are at our command; we must adjust it to other ideas which already we possess, or the other ideas to it, or we shall never make a thought our own. Why, even a stone, dropped into a pond, is welcomed with a splash, and with circles running out to the farther edge; and men and women, in our Christian congregations, imagine that they can receive and profit by the truth without the faintest ruffling of their placid exterior, and without any stirring in the depths. It is not possible; and however unpleasing it may be, we ought to welcome as a true, divine ministry the stimulating presentation of truth, which calls the mind awake even to challenge and to contradict. I wonder what goad would be keen enough

to set some of us moving, or make them realise that God may have something to say which hitherto they have missed.

It is not only minds that need the goad, but consciences. The plague of familiar words is that they set the conscience to sleep. "I thought that he said what he ought to have said"—that is the unspoken commentary on many a sermon; and even these noble and rest-giving elements of truth have sometimes become a stupefying potion to the conscience. God has done everything, and thus there is nothing required of you. You live as your fellow-Christians live, borrowing your fashions of godly conduct from them, and you need to be provoked into considering what your calling itself requires. Our chief duty as Christians is to become what we are, not merely to receive the promises, but to accept the obligations, which are ours. If we have died with Christ, we should not let the habits of our former life master us still; if we have risen with Christ, surely we should, as of necessity, be seeking things which are above where Christ is. Think how high and hard a conception of duty is given in such a word as this, "He hath made us priests unto God!" To enter into the holiest of all, where God is, and to go not as an occasional privilege, but as a point of daily duty and honour; and since it is the pure in heart who see Him, to keep one's spirit simple and clear. And then, as if this were not enough for any man, we must seek as priests to help other men to God, to bear them on

our hearts and to interpret God to them,—how much is wrapped up in that! What scrutiny of self, what revising of standards, what distrust of the accepted and the customary, what willingness to be taught anywhere and in any form! That is *duty*, remember; it belongs to the office into which God has set us; and for its right discharge we surely need some stimulating and innovating voice to break up our self-complacent ease.

And we need the goad to set our wills aworking. Jesus said of His friends, "They go in and *go out*, and find pasture," and some of us need no stimulus so much as that which would send them out. There are busy minds, hospitable to anything like a new idea, and there are consciences, sensitive and almost morbid, but the fruit of work which either brings is insufficient. John Duncan was hard upon himself at this point, drawing contrasts always to his own disadvantage. "My doctrine about faith was better than Chalmers's, but his faith was better than mine." "I am pernickety about doctrine; but I lie in bed all day and read, whilst Guthrie is out doing good." There is something a great deal better than orthodoxy, or even than moral refinement; there is obedience. Paul bids us "walk in love *as Christ loved us*," and God is not ashamed to use very ragged and heterodox apostles to disturb the inglorious ease of His people, and to lead them out into that life of sacrifice where Jesus has showed the way. We need to be provoked into doing God's will, and so we must

not, like these stereotyped Jews, look too shyly at words and teachings which are unfamiliar. Their unfamiliarity might, of itself, suggest that they are sent of God. If the accustomed has failed of its end, we must not marvel if He catches at other instruments, and thus "the words of the wise are as goads."

XVI.

THE BOOK OF THE STREETS.

"But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd."—MATT. ix. 36.

I WISH to speak this morning of what Jesus found in the familiar spectacle of a crowd.

Sir Walter Besant, in one of his novels, speaks of "the book of the streets," over which many spend a lifetime, and he adds that "he who can read it aright may become a prophet, a poet, or a leader of the people." Those to whom a crowd is wholly commonplace will think such language fantastic and extravagant; for in this, as in other books, a man finds only as much as he can. Bacon speaks of the "play-pleasure" of watching men; and so far we all can go in the enjoyment of the endless procession and comedy of the streets. In whimsical variety, known and unknown, in rags and satin, quaint and tragical and commonplace, prude rubbing shoulder with outcast, so they pass along before our eyes, and it is seldom that we fail to find something to touch our humour. But beyond the spectacle and the comedy many of us

never go. Their imagination is not stirred by that full stream of human life. A veil is spread for them over the things which really make the interest of the spectacle—the sore compulsions that drive men still along, the memories they would fain escape, the love that beckons to them, the courage which will not be daunted. They see nothing in the throng but its brilliance or its squalor, for it needs a discipline of eye and heart to go below the surface.

Galilee teemed with human life. Josephus, who had organised an army of defence there and knew the resources of the land, suggests a population as dense as that of Belgium to-day. Much of the soil was exuberantly fertile, and not a plot was left untilled; but the people were far too thick upon the ground. As in modern India, the village money-lender had a hand upon everything, and the peasants toiled from dawn to dark without release. They lived mainly not in cottages on the crofts, but huddled into towns and villages, in whose tangled lanes the filth of years lay rotting. Fever was never absent; leprosy was a grim commonplace; ophthalmia and blindness were frequent. No doubt it had its other side. Men can adapt themselves to the most hideous conditions, and perhaps in Galilee they could match our sluttish Scots proverb—"the clartier the cosier."

Children were born and were happy there, and men lived and hoped and prayed; but life was squalid and monotonous. Religion, which has often been the consolation and the refuge of the poor, came to them

mainly in the form of a heartless ritual, of which they were, not unnaturally, negligent; and there was reason for the scornful saying, "This people which knoweth not the law is accursed." "Can the Christ come out of Galilee?" it was asked; and any one who knew the real paganism of the people required no answer. We know something of the effects of such a life. Faces become blurred and dimmed by hopeless toil; the women become spiritless, gossiping, and irritable; and the men even in their vocabulary betray the fewness of their interests. It has been reckoned that English field-labourers in some districts use no more than five or six hundred words for all the purposes of their life, whilst Shakespeare needed fifteen thousand to utter all his thought; and in the case of these Galileans the muddiness of mind appeared even in their accent. They moved about in a world of dim resentments and suspicions which could not well be put in words. Cloudily they felt that justice in a quarrel was not for them, since the rich man was always found in the right; and if luck did come their way, and they raised their heads, the taxgatherer was on the watch, and increased their burden. Herod and his palaces and theatres and baths, his butterfly courtiers and his swaggering guards, were all loaded on the back of the peasant, who crouched over every patch and pocketful of fertile soil. It was a sordid spectacle. In that glorious climate, set down amidst the pageantry of the sun and flowers, human life had little charm.

The Herodians took it as of course that such mere animals should provide for the festival of their existence. The patriot zealots found their advantage in the continual ferment of discontent; for when men can bear no more they are ready for the most desperate enterprise. And the religious people had no prescription and no hope. Jesus Himself, having gone about and surveyed the land, returned with no very cheering judgment. The people, in His eyes, were like sheep overdriven, lying where they had fallen down, or stumbling on because they must—a flock left to itself, chased by hopes and terrors of their own imagining, straying until they perished within reach of an abundance they had not wit to discover. "He had compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd."

But what struck Jesus was not the *sorrow* of the situation, but the opportunity; not their disaster and misery so much as their value. Any one in an idle moment of sentiment might say, "Poor creatures!" It is a rarer gift to see in the most disastrous human life a prize that is worth the winning. It is easy to say, "A man's a man for a' that"; it is not so easy to add, "And I will help to give him a man's life." Jesus missed nothing of the pitifulness, but what troubled Him was the want of men to help in changing these conditions. "Oh, pray to God for men!" He said to the disciples: Here is a whole harvest of life and heart waiting to be gathered, and there is no one to bring it in.

What enabled Him to see that in a spectacle so unpromising?

1. You will not, I trust, be insulted if I say that Christ saw because He looked; for really it is a marvel why some men suppose their eyes were given to them. "He that hath ears to hear, let him *hear*," said Jesus, for the ear is something more than an ornament; and a man has not exhausted the uses of his eyes when they have guided him past the ditch. The world outspread before us is for our learning, and yet many minds are so torpid that they do not receive what the senses would report. There is nothing more astonishing on the human side of Christ's teaching than the variety of life that is in it. Historians of the time acknowledge their debt, for the whole spectacle of existence in Galilee is unfolded in the parables. Nothing escaped His look. With the shadow of the Cross already on His heart, He had an eye for Zacchæus in the tree, recognised from his dress something of his social station, and realised in an instant what his presence there meant. Ten lepers, huddled in their rags, cried to Him from a distance for help; and to Jesus they were not a little crowd of lepers indiscriminate, they were ten, and He noted that one was a Samaritan, and that it was he who came back. You think these trifles; they are really the things which distinguish the man who *sees* from his slow-sighted neighbours. There is scarcely any gift like the living eye, and much of our blindness is due to a bad habit of not looking. We may run to the

other extreme; and some people are like women sitting at their front windows to watch the passers-by, because they have no interests in the house. But our eyes were given to see with, and we are sinning against ourselves, we are losing our chance of knowing this amazing world, if we drift in self-absorption about the streets. Some people are so interested in the concerns of their own set that they have no eyes for others, and do not know what exists in their own community. Sometimes their blindness is deliberate, for they turn away from what they prefer not to think of. They know that there is much which, if they saw it, would make them uncomfortable and would make their indolence seem a crime, and so they do not see it. Sin flaunts past them, and in a resolute ignorance they let it go; and faces of men are written over with lamentation and woe, and they will not heed the appeal of that writing. If we are to know the world as Christ did, we must compel ourselves to look, and must believe in what we see.

2. But looking itself is vain without *imagination.* There are many people to whom an object says nothing. Like an inexpert scholar before a defaced and broken inscription, they see dimly what is there, and have no guess at what is not there. Faces never tell a story to them; a hint is never enough. Ruskin says of Titian "that he could have put issues of life and death into the face of a man asking his way, nay, into the *back* of him. He has put a whole scheme of dogmatic theology into a row of bishops'

backs at the Louvre." That is the real gift of imaginative seeing, the gift of the interpreting eye. In late years some writers have given us sketches of what may be found in plain people in mean streets; and though much of the work be botched and unreal, a service is rendered if we have learned from them to call nothing common or unclean. It is our dulness which casts a shadow on the streets; for, as Pascal says, "the less commonplace a man is, the more remarkable people he will meet." A man or woman who brands a whole community as without interest, is revealing nothing but the vacancy of his own mind.

In Jesus you will continually find the gift of imaginative seeing. He had what Renan claimed, the power of seeing underground. There was much in Galilee to delude the onlooker. There were the stir and hum of busy life; towns were growing fast, and were being adorned with splendid buildings; the lake was busy with fishing-boats, and the fish-curing at Tarichæa was expanding into a great industry; on the trade roads caravans followed close upon each other. They bought and sold, married and danced and sang, they built as if for ages to come; it was a rich and exuberant life by the lake. But Christ, who had grown in the midst of it, was able to put His ear to the ground and hear, below the babel of business, the sighing of hearts that needed God. He knew how love and hope and faith made some of these dim dwellings sacred, and He knew men who

had grown rich in the world, but poor and mean in heart. When the Samaritan woman with her glib tongue came where He was, what struck Him most was her jaded face; and speaking to the meaning of her look, He said, "If thou hadst known the gift of God." Poor, tired soul, for whom no light of life is burning anywhere, and you are in God's world! If you knew the gift of God you would ask of Him, and He would give thee living water. It is through the use of that gift that the streets grow great.

3. But there is a heartless imagination which quickly finds its limit. Some men are born anatomists, and their pleasure is to dissect and expose the nerves of human conduct. A drunkard going down into the shadow of his own impotence is to them a subject merely; and all the miseries and tragedies which they see are taken as the unavoidable incidents of life. Now, to observation and imagination there must be added tenderness if we are to see as Christ did. The care for individual souls is a Christian achievement, not to slump men together in masses, but to consider them one by one—that is Christ's lesson. For the Shepherd leaves the ninety and nine in the wilderness that He may seek the one.

Jesus Himself realised all that makes for sin, the loneliness, confusion, and flurry that send many into evil. We all *like sheep* have gone astray—like sheep, not wolves, not from deliberate badness and not in

sheer ferocity. Carlyle says, "Sheep go in flocks for three reasons: first, because they are of a gregarious temperament, and *love* to be together; second, because of their cowardice they are afraid to be left alone; third, because the common run of them are dull of sight to a proverb, and can have no choice of roads." That is said of us, and Jesus knew its truth; and with His tenderness He divined the secret of the worst. He had condemnation in reserve for evil; but the condemnation was most for sins of the mind, and He had helpful pity for those who had stumbled blindly into sin, or who had been swept into it in some gust of passion. We need far more of tenderness if we are to see the crowd without disgust or scorn, as Jesus did, if we are to learn how much of haste and witlessness there is in what revolts us, how very human is the battered creature you turn from in sheer dismay. Like sheep they go astray, and there are wolves to devour them. Girls come in a freak or fit of temper from their homes into Edinburgh, thinking here to get a situation, and darkness waits for them—children of fourteen in what at worst is naughtiness, and they are swept away by the shame of our city. "They know not that the dead are there, and that their steps take hold on hell." "Like sheep without a shepherd"—who is going to keep them right? There is a story of pity for every figure of scandal on our streets, and we need to get from Christ the heart of tenderness to do it justice.

4. And further, let me speak of reverence, without which the work of Christ can hardly be done. He calls us not to a kindly pity for an erring fellow-creature, but to an offering of reverence in presence of what is great and is only by an accident degraded. In Christ there was no touch of contempt, and indeed in all the greatest there is none. "No knight of Arthur's noblest dealt in scorn." A noble nature imputes its own quality to all it meets with; it treats every man as noble also, and of its own kin, interested in high things; and thus it has the chance of seeing what is in each man. The eyes which have no reverence will see little; they will note every darn in a man's coat, they will brighten at every defect in his grammar; vigilant and eager, they will mark whatever is odd or faulty or unusual in him; and, seeing everything, as they think, they will miss whatever is most worth seeing. For men, who were made in the image of God, can never be seen by those who have not reverence. It is not that they see in part; they can scarcely be said to see at all.

For that toiling mass of human life the religious teacher had little but disdain; these were the people who knew not the law, of whom little need be asked. The people about Jerusalem were far more to the priestly mind, where population was scanty, and life was leisured, and where the great harvest of the year was at feast times. The Jews there had a money interest in orthodoxy. Like the people in small cathedral towns in England, they hung upon the

temple, and wore their clothes like cassocks. In comparison with such people the Galilean had little chance of favour. He was rough, vulgar, profane, not at all the kind of man you easily think of as in heaven. But he was very human, and Jesus, observing him well, pronounced that in His kingdom some that were last should be first; in those whose hot, animal nature had betrayed them He welcomed true lords in the new world of goodness. The vigour of nature which had sent them so hotly on the evil way might be turned in another direction, and He saw no reason why a bad man should not become one of the best of men. And with a splendid audacity He laid His hand on these offences of society and claimed them for goodness. To those who looked on, it seemed preposterous, and they were ready with their ugly insinuations when He sought such people out; and no doubt others, who wished their fellow-creatures well, thought Jesus credulous and over-sanguine. He heeded not. He saw in those whom men forsook some kinship with His Father, and saw them in a world not poor or stinted in love. There is light enough to transfigure every lot; there is grace in the heart of God to transform the whole creation; there is a love in God single and separate for every human creature. And do you say, when this is true, that this man can never live a different life? He fought that battle over and over again across some crouching human figure, and He fought it in one way, not raising questions of the man's stability, but of

God's love to him. "Thy poor brother for whom Christ died"—that is Paul's appeal to reverence; and it marvellously clears our seeing and banishes contempt as we go about the streets.

5. And the last thing in Christ's seeing is His willing energy. In some men hand and eye do not keep time. Some begin to work before they have looked, and it takes much of the wisdom of wise people to repair the blunders of these well-meaning good people. Others study and see, but their hand is not infected. Jesus looked, and recognising, with a leap of heart, His chance, He set Himself to work. In men's confusion and defect He saw an opportunity for Himself and for all right helpers. Men were waiting for leadership, for happiness, for truth, which in a *godless* world would be a sorry sight. But then in the world of Jesus, God was the first fact and the last, the nearest and the tenderest fact of all; and He went about to tell men of the grace which had come to seek them out.

At the grave of a man who was killed by the police in Trafalgar Square, William Morris said, "Our friend has had a hard life, and met with a hard death; and if society had been different his life might have been a delightful, a beautiful, and a happy one. It is our business to organise for the purpose of seeing that such things shall not happen." That is a kind of gospel, and it has enlisted the service of many honest and good men. I think it has its place in any *complete* gospel, and that men have badly learned

the lesson of Christ's compassion who are willing to leave their fellow-creatures in conditions in which virtue is a kind of marvel. But that message of social reconstruction is somewhat far away, and meanwhile men are dying. And Christ came near to those who had never looked for kindness or respect, and He called them back to goodness. He followed them, accepting the derision which such companionship brought upon Him, and by His love and His trust He made them hope for themselves. He wanted men to realise the truth of the old saying that God's word is not in heaven, neither is it beyond the sea, "but the Word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it." The transformation in the life of a man does not wait on circumstances; it is possible *now*. To the most jaded and dejected of men the new life has come near, which means beauty for ashes, and joy for mourning, and praise for heaviness.

It is one of the sad tokens of our time that direct evangelism has greatly lost in favour. Probably we need to change our forms somewhat, but we cannot depart from the facts. The world is a hard place for many, and we who bear the name of Christ must follow His example and keep near to the men for whom He died the assurance of the power which renews. "The kingdom of heaven has come near," that is the message Christ has given us, and in face of it we dare not despair of men. They have not fallen beyond the love of God, which even now is

taking some that were last to set them among the first. The heart of Christ is waiting for some of us to be ministers to those poor brothers for whom He died. "Pray God for men!" He says to-day; and are you without a witness of your own?

XVII.

THE GREAT CONVICTION.

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."—Rom. i. 16.

"I AM not ashamed of the gospel," that is easily said by a man who has received it as a decent tradition, and has never tried to do anything with it; but when people are in earnest about their faith and their duty they are much more likely to confess that sometimes they have been ashamed. It is easy to say as of course, Christ can save any man; but when you have realised the desperate conditions of a single family or a single individual, and go to better these conditions by some Christian influence, you may well have visitings of doubt: I wonder if many of us, with a real will to help, could walk along the Cowgate on a Saturday night, and watch the people without some inward disquiet:—women whose features have been marred by the blows of husband and lover, and marred more sadly by a life of riot and idleness; men who have grown grey without the discipline of settled labour, and without the ministry of purifying thought, the bondsmen of our society for whom the pleasures

and the interests and the teachings which are most to us have no existence: lads clustering idly at the corners, with bad secrets passing round, waiting for the vice or the crime which will catch them down to a lower depth. You believe that Christ can save all; but if you were asked to speak of Christ to these, the difficulties in them and in yourself would gather up before you, and if you began it would be with a burdened feeling that nothing great would come of it. Habit and circumstance are strong, and the wood, it seems, is too rotten to hold the nail. That is the test which searches men, and it was in presence of this test that Paul said, I am not ashamed. Knowing all the disadvantage and the unlikelihood, he believed that Jesus Christ could make the balance even.

He had been bred in a big commercial town, and since then he had lived in Jerusalem, Ephesus, Corinth, so that he knew what city life was at its worst, and now he was planning an assault on Rome. That was a city by itself; it was not the capital of a nation, but of the world. It had mastered Italy and Greece and northern Africa, and, spreading out its arms, it had gathered to itself the control of East and West and North, so that in all the world of culture now there was no government left on foot but this. We in Britain know how the pride of empire holds the mind; and though we ourselves may be no wiser or farther seeing than other men, we never forget the greatness of our race, and we almost resent the suggestion that other nations can teach us more than

they can learn. That high imperial disdain was perfected in Rome, and nowhere did it seem less likely that the gospel of humility and of sacrifice should find an entrance. And then, to make the matter worse, there had streamed into the city men of all the subject nations, bringing with them the superstitions and the vices of their homes, with the result that in Rome there was gathered a population heterogeneous and corrupt beyond all precedent. Work in Italy had passed largely into the hands of slaves; war was left more and more to troops recruited in the new provinces; and in the narrow lanes of the Capital there was huddled a people proud but with little reason, averse from labour and from thought, shameless in its vices, brutal and bloodthirsty in its pleasures. It was the Rome of Nero which Paul proposed to visit, and, in view of which, he said, I am not ashamed. And you must consider more, that he belonged to a race which had made its power felt and its name detested. The city was infested by Jews. They followed a host of minor trades, they peddled sulphur matches for old glass, and the Jewess with her bag or basket went everywhere: they told fortunes and explained dreams. "They sell dreams very cheap," says Juvenal; "but then Jews sell everything." Some had grown rich and aped the manners of the wealthy Romans; but everywhere they were distrusted as intriguers, panders, and secret agents of all kinds. Paul himself, in his Roman letter, hints at their reputation when he says, "thou that abhorrest

idols, dost thou rob temples"? For the Jew, Fagin, the privy instigator of crime, is not a creation of modern fiction, he dates back to the Christian era at least. Clearly, to come to Rome as a penniless Jew was to come with a terrible burden of disadvantage. And there were personal disabilities; Paul knew how men remarked on his shabby figure and his broken and entangled way of speaking. He had no grace of manner and no power of winning speech to commend him, and thus for him it might have seemed an altogether desperate adventure. He knew all that, and it only sent him back with more of admiration on Christ who could bear him through. If the treasure is in earthern vessels, at least it is a treasure; and with that as his only commendation and ally he was not afraid to face the task. It is a power, he says, a power unto salvation, and it is for every one who believes.

1. What first gave Paul courage in presence of odds so overwhelming was the knowledge which he had of the gospel as a power, a power of God. Many people know it only as a tradition; they received it from their parents as a form of teaching and a rule of conduct. They come to church from custom, and when they bow the knee or sing a Psalm the thought is not far off of those from whom they took example first. As men are made, that is by no means to be despised; a habit into which family affection and reverence for good men and women are woven has something of God in it, and it may outlast things of much greater

pretension. And yet, if there is nothing more than habit, a test like this will soon expose its weakness. If your ultimate reason for churchgoing and prayer is that your father did these things before you, you are more fortunate, indeed, but in what are you better than the man whose inheritance is all of another sort? and how are you going to grapple with his conditions? It is the meeting of two traditions, yours and his—yours which has led to church and faith and uprightness, and his which has shut him up to ignorance and riot. No doubt, you have the advantage by comparison, but how are you going to transform his custom? for men are moved not by what you can report from others, but by what you can say from yourself.

Some of us go further, for they really have studied the gospel. They have read books and heard sermons, and they have come to hold strong and serious convictions about it. And yet to them the gospel is largely a parcel of opinions, as to which they agree or disagree, they are orthodox or heterodox, but they never emerge from the region of possible argument. But if such people had to speak to those who never read and who have no interest in opinions, they would quickly find themselves at a loss. There is a great education for oneself in that direction. "I found," said John Duncan at one point, "that I had not gospel enough to make a sermon"; and we may never realise how little we know until we try to teach other men for their profit.

Now to Paul the first thing in the gospel, coming even before its truth, was its power; it justifies itself and makes its way by doing something. To Paul himself it had come like a strong man armed, and had broken his resistance down. There was a time when he not only dissented from this Christian preaching as error, he detested it with all the energy of his heart, for more even than heathenism it seemed to threaten those things which he had learned to revere. From the first he saw, what the disciples had not seen, that Church and Temple could not stand together, and that if this Jesus were to be Lord, then sacrifice and priesthood were at an end. Now these things were very dear to him. In them he had found God, and the sincerity of his religion made him eager against the unlettered peasants who were threatening so much more than they knew. He spared no labour to stamp the mischief out. He could not rest at home whilst the fire was bursting forth in distant places, and in the midday heats, when other men were resting, he drove his party on to Damascus, as if the loss of half a day were unendurable. That was his mood when Christ laid hands upon him, not a vague dislike, but a serious conviction, which was strengthened by tradition and self-interest and a fanatical piety. Some men are fond of telling of their conversion, because they like, on any pretext, to talk about themselves; but Paul often came back on his own story, because there, in an extreme case, he found the essential character of the gospel. It does not need to wait on favouring

circumstances or moods; it does not require that minds should first be conciliated and prepared, though these may help. It is able to make its own way, to create its own conditions; "the weapons of our warfare are mighty before God, casting down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

Paul's letters are rich in argument which may mislead us as to the real ground of his faith. He believed, no doubt, in the possibility of persuading men in that way, but that was not the proof he chiefly sought for. His own experience had shown him the meaning of what he calls "the demonstration of the Spirit and of power." After all, he would have said, I am a Christian man not because of any train of reasoning, but because I could not help it. I ran athwart a will which is stronger than my own, a wisdom deeper, a love more tenacious. "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me"; and when I looked upon Him, and saw in His face nothing but beauty and majesty and forgiveness, all my arguments and my resistance fell away, and I said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

That record has found abundant confirmation in all the ages since. Men come to Christ by many roads, but in their various dialects a place is given to the constraint of Jesus Christ: "We love because He loved first"; against that no strength avails. Inveterate habit of evil slackens its hold, and even

where the mind has been poisoned and possessed by unbelief, Christ makes His way. A man does not need to wait until he has prepared himself, and cleansed his heart for Christ to enter. When Christ comes, He does that for Himself. This made Paul bold in facing Rome. He knew that he was weak, but he kept company every day with things which were irresistible; and he travelled on from city to city, where hearts were inaccessible through pride, or defiled with lust, and he told his story, believing that God, who had mastered him, had a heart not less for these men. It is a *power*, it does something, "casting down every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God."

2. And beyond the power, Paul saw the urgency of this ministry. He had learned to use great words as touching human life, and here he singles out a word both great and plain, and says, this power is unto *salvation*. As many of our noblest have done, Paul lived in sight of the Judgment-seat of God. With all his heart he believed that men were moving on towards that, and what stirred him in the spectacle of a city full of men was the appalling indifference. They knew the better way; even heathen men had a law written in their hearts; but day by day they fell below what that law required, and they took no heed. They lived as if mean thoughts, and greed, and rage, and envy leave no mark upon the soul. Their bodies bore old scars, marks of wounds, twistings and distortions from the custom of a trade, traces of

hard weather; but they lived as if the soul were unassailed, as if at any moment they could throw the evil life aside and start afresh as strong and healthy men. And meanwhile, in following vanity they grew vain, and passion worked more deeply into the core and substance of their life, and the striving for mean prizes carried them away from the sphere of the great things. That met him in every street, lives going to waste, growing emptier, more hopeless, less elastic and pliable with every day. And they must all appear before the Judgment-seat of Christ!

It is a thought of which we make too little, that men are losing their life, and that the time is hurrying on which will bring them to see that they have lost it. These marvellous natures, with treasures of affection, with powers of hope and aspiration, and these times through which the men have lived, with days all full of teaching and divine influence and opportunity,—they have come together in vain, the men and the occasion which was to fashion them anew. For them all things were possible; they have been touching God at every turn in life: and they have learned nothing, and now the evil days have come. "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and they are not saved." Of course, we may speculate as to the future, but we must remember always that it is speculation, for what the world shows is a life which has missed all its chances. In crisis after crisis this man has chosen wrongly. He has loved darkness rather than light. Disciplines by which his

brothers were taught have been wasted on him; and now habit and circumstance are masters, and hold him to his own failure.

"When I thought of these things they were too painful for me." Paul, seeing with his heart the disaster of men, plunged into every crowd with the news of a Deliverer. He told of a power by which life can be re-made, and the bonds of habit broken,—a power which can give even in old age a second spring-time of love and hope, which can so work on men that, without figure, it is true that "if a man be in Christ he is a new creature, and the old things have passed away." If the loss of a soul is not seen only at the end of life, but runs back and back throughout unfruitful years, so the salvation of a soul is not wholly of the end. It is health and life; it is hope where troubled expectation was, and strength and manhood where courage had given way. Salvation is nothing else than the life of God in the soul of man, and it is that we have in Jesus Christ.

"I felt," says John Duncan, "that if the evangelical system were true, it was worth believing." In a world which is sentenced to decadence and decline, it is good enough to be true that God has verily sent into the world a power which is unto salvation.

3. Paul's courage would not have been so great, had this grace been hard to win. Good news for the few rather adds to the burden of the many; and if this salvation were for a nation or a class when the whole world groans under the common plague, there

would be little comfort in it. The condition, if there be one, must be such as all can satisfy, lying well within the plain humanities. It is "unto every one that believeth." God says, I give thee, and the heart answers, I accept. God, in His pity, comes to the men whom He has made, and offers a life abundant and sufficing; and though the record of their ill-success abashes them, they take Him at His word. Paul went into dark places, and, in the name of Christ, he called men who had ceased to look for good; and they came, a slave or two, a widow, a social outcast, nearly all of them creatures of the shadow. They dared to trust His word, and they found themselves in a new society, where even the vocabulary had been changed, and all bright and happy visions had a place. "Their faith had saved them."

There are some of you who feel that life is running from them, and that they have not found the best which it contains; and God speaks to you in these promises of Scripture, which have been as meaningless in your ears as if they were written in an unknown tongue. These words have never been proved except by men to whom at first they seemed incredible, but who flung themselves upon them to find if God were indeed as good as His word. And that, whatever our feelings and opinions may have been, is the answer which He desires. "To every one that believeth," it is said, which brings the question home to you and me, for salvation is in our offer.

That was what gave Paul courage in visiting new lands and cities. Christ might often have reason to be ashamed of His servant's preaching, the servant need never be ashamed; for beyond his bravest word, he knew the fact extended of the power of the redeeming love of God, "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think"; it is a great saying, and if we are to do much for human lives, we must take it with us.

XVIII.

A WORKING FAITH.

"But in the same spirit of faith which he had who said, I believed, and therefore did I speak; we also believe, and therefore do we speak."—2 Cor. iv. 13.

I SHOULD like to speak of what the manifold activities of a Church really mean. Any congregation discharges a social function in drawing people together and uniting them in certain common interests. It has an influence in education, as busy, secular men are drawn by it to concern themselves even for an hour with matters of eternal moment. But these are not enough, and the calamity of many Churches is that they have forgotten their real object, and they drift much like derelict vessels, moving at the mercy of ocean currents or any sudden flurry of wind. Paul speaks of the Church as "the pillar and ground of the truth," a steadfast and unmistakable witness; but many Churches testify to nothing more august or mysterious than the power of an old tradition to maintain itself after it has lost all right to honour. Their members give no suggestion that they know the port for which they are making. Newman said that "the object of

the preacher is the salvation of the hearer"; but some of us scarcely know what salvation means, and they would be gravely disconcerted if these mighty powers began to work in their environment. We have in every Church to-day a various organisation —guilds, classes, clubs, societies, but what do we look for from these? Surely we do not maintain them because our neighbours report well of them, or because they are good for those who take charge. "It is because I believe," says Paul, "that I speak"; have we any corresponding word?

The whole life of the Apostle has a look of misdirection. He was on the way to universal recognition by his race; and, at a sudden impulse, he threw himself against all that was most sensitive and most tenacious in their tradition. He was a scholar and a saint in the making, and from that placid life he wantonly plunged into a world of storm. Riots broke out wherever he appeared; he had to escape from Damascus over the walls; at the gates of Lystra he was left for dead; in Corinth, as later in Jerusalem, he was rescued from a murderous mob by the Roman authorities; at Philippi he was scourged and imprisoned; at Ephesus he had an experience which he can only describe as fighting with wild beasts. Probably, that is what he speaks of in this chapter (vv. 8, 9) in words which read like an account of a desperate chase through the tangled lanes and passages of an Eastern city: "Everywhere I am hard pressed, yet not quite driven into a corner;

in a bad fix, only a door opens and I slip through; chased, but not falling into the pursuers' hands; knocked down, but not made an end of; with the pallor of a dead man on my face, though life and hope may kindle in my heart." That single incident he widens out into a description of his whole experience as a hunted man; but what else could one expect who set himself against the most sacred traditions of a proud and passionate race? Looked at from the outside, it does seem a disastrously mismanaged life; but then it had another meaning. It was not obstinate pride which sustained him in face of that wide hostility,—the fact that he had chosen his course and was too stubborn to confess that he had erred. "I believe," says Paul, "and all my activity and all my pertinacity come from that."

I think that without violence we may break this up a little, so that, for our guidance in Christian work, we may hear Paul saying that, through his faith—

1. He found it possible to speak, for it gave him something to say.

2. He felt bound to speak at any cost to himself.

3. He discovered that the result repaid the pains.

1. Faith makes speaking possible, for it gives us something to say. In putting it so, I would not have you think only of preaching, for the whole compass of our Christian activity is an endeavour to get our message delivered in an adequate fashion. In another passage (vi. 4), the Apostle tells how variously he commended himself as a servant of God,—"in pure-

ness, in knowledge, in kindness, in love unfeigned." The actual word was only a small part of the speaking, but faith accounted for every part. Hausrath says of Paul that "the whole man was Apostle." "As the shepherd instinct distinguishes Jesus, so does the missionary impulse mark out Paul. Everywhere he comes it is on the way to somewhere else. He clambers over the snowy heights of Taurus, and feels a drawing towards the Lycaonian valleys; he wanders down to the Ægean, and there in a dream he sees a man of Macedonia who says, Come over and help us; he arrives at Corinth and ships are setting forth for Italy; he writes to Rome and announces that he will come on his way to Spain. Across the sea voices are calling him, and when he sits alone he broods over those who have not heard." An activity so relentless would be inexplicable if he had not felt that he had something to say. Long established institutions may drowse along, the mere *vis inertiæ* secures that; but here is an impulse which is orginal!

Paul frequently speaks of what he calls "my gospel," by which he does not so much mean to distinguish it from what other teachers proclaimed, as to make it plain that it was really his. It does not matter how the gospel comes to our knowledge, through the slow process of a careful education, or in some crisis of fresh discovery; in any case, it needs, as it were, to be born anew in a man, given into his possession as a word which is true for himself, so that henceforth he can put his signature

upon it, and proclaim it as a personal certainty. That is what *makes* preaching. "Definiteness," says Newman, "is the life of preaching; nothing that is anonymous will preach, nothing that is dead and gone, nothing even which is of yesterday, however religious in itself and useful." Preaching is truth as seen by a man for himself, and felt, and enjoyed, and wondered at; and no preaching can be entirely bad except that which is colourless and impersonal, which any one might have delivered with equal propriety. It is *my* gospel that I preach, said Paul; "for the same God who, at the creation, said, Let light shine out of darkness, shined in my dark heart, letting me see the face of Jesus Christ, and in that, showing me the divine glory." Faith opened his eyes to what God is, and thus to what the world of God is meant to be; and without faith we shall never have the indispensable qualification for doing work among our fellows, for that is the gift of having something to say from ourselves. General Wolfe, when he was in Glasgow with his regiment, reported on the ministers as "excessive blockheads, so truly and obstinately dull that they shut out knowledge at every entrance." No doubt, they multiplied words, but essentially such men could not speak, for they had nothing to say.

What faith brought within Paul's range was the vision of a God coming to men on the footing, not of debt but of grace, which gave him a ministry. It meant that all men were worth something, and the differences of race and class went down like the walls

of Jericho, and outspread before the Apostle was the spectacle of a world of men who were all poorer than they should have been, for lack of God. What he saw as good for others was, first of all, glad and wonderful to himself. And this certainty of God's goodwill threw light both back and forwards. If God thinks me worth redeeming, then there can be nothing of accident in my experience, and the beautiful doctrine of providence came to him as an inference from redemption. And for the future?

> "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
> To the last syllable of recorded time,
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death!"

Faith banishes that. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" says Paul. "I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor another creation, can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." So faith made him nobly careless about himself and his comfort and his future; these things were in other hands. It made him deeply reverent of the men for whom Christ died; the poorest and most abject creature had that inalienable title of honour. So everywhere he had an object clear in his work, and our work for men will be poor and unlighted if we have not some faith like his to give it character.

2. But his faith, also, made him feel bound to speak. Open eyes are not a merit, they are a grace,

and the seeing man everywhere is under an obligation to help the blind. That is what was slowly driven in upon the Hebrews. Their first instinct was to take God's choice of them as an exclusive privilege, and centuries passed before they realised that it meant election to office. So late in the history as the book of Jonah they still required that this elementary lesson should be forced home by story and parable. A man is sent to denounce a heathen city, and he does it with gusto, because it is never hard to acknowledge our neighbour's fault; but when it appeared that God had a place in His compassion for Nineveh, he sulked like a spoiled child. That is you, says the author, turning upon his fellows. You were sunk and lost in the sea of nations, and then by miracle you were restored, and God sent you out to do the whole world good; but a God whom you must share with all the world is not a God to your mind. Well, look at yourself in the figure of the sullen prophet! Does it strike you as dignified or glorious, or worthy of those who have seen? On a very different level, and associated with much that is saintly, was the monastic ideal; it drew good men together and buried them in distant valleys far from the coarse broils of the world, as if it were no part of a man's goodness to seek to make the world better. Paul says, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel!" I believe, and therefore I cannot leave my brethren unattempted. This light which has shined in my heart is far too

amazing and too good to be held as a private possession. A doctor who, for his own profit, kept secret a discovery which would mean the alleviation of pain for thousands, would be at once discredited; but what is to be said of men or women who know the reconciling truth, and who yet have no part in setting it forward? Ruskin was always critical of any demand to help his neighbours. "By rights," he says, "I ought to be out among the budding banks and hedges, outlining sprays of hawthorn and clusters of primrose. That is my right work"; but even in that defiant humour, he admits that "as in a sorely besieged town every man must to the ramparts, whatsoever business he leaves, so neither have I had any choice but to go on crusade." A man ought at least "to carry the fiery cross his appointed leagues, and then give it to another hand." In that demand there is nothing impossible, and from it no one, who sees at all, can extricate himself.

Speaking, as I have said, is not all of one sort. "God spoke in many parts and in many modes," as we are told, and people still require to be persuaded in varying ways. Each age needs to be impressed in a way of its own; and very notably, in our day, when many have grown reckless through self-contempt and self-despair, there is need afresh of persuading them that they are worth something. They cannot hear "for the anguish of their spirit and for the cruel bondage," the word of the gospel has had no support in their experience,

and in order to create in them a dawning possibility of faith that, perhaps, God cares, there must be given in human deeds an assurance that, at least, men care. This Christian faith is not a ghostly, disembodied thing; it is a religion of incarnation, which everywhere, for its proclamation, requires words which have hands and feet. Peter suggests that pagan husbands "may be won, *without a word*, by the pure behaviour of their wives"; and Jesus Christ asks for services of that kind from men and women who, with any gift or counsel, give themselves, entering frankly into life, and dealing with its real temptations, purifying the amusements and the friendships, and enriching the outlook of their neighbours. Without a word, says Peter, for there are more effective ways of speaking than lips and tongue can compass.

Only we must see to it that all services of this kind are regarded only as instruments for the more adequate expression of what faith has revealed. Much that is kindly, suitable, and well intentioned does fail in the end, because it does not aim high enough, and because it has not faith's view of what life is meant to be.

3. And, finally, of the result. Paul says, "Death worketh in me." I am an old fellow now, suffering and broken, but *life is working in you.* His faith assured him of that, and here again we are on ground that is familiar. There is a Rabbinic saying that "two dry sticks and a green one will burn," and fire often breaks out where the balance of numbers inclines

the other way, for conviction makes itself felt. Coleridge asks about Daniel O'Connell why he was so triumphant in debate and in action, and his answer is, "Because he asserts a broad principle, and acts up to it, and rests all his body upon it." Bagehot, writing with no hearty goodwill of Mr. Gladstone, says, "He has a nature towards his audience. He is sure that if they only knew what he knows, they would feel as he feels, and believe as he believes, and *by this he conquers*." One believer who rests his whole body on what he believes is worth fifty who are half-hearted. The sense that a man means something, and that his words find an echo in his eyes, can never be without effect. If those for whom you labour feel that you will be disappointed and pained in any failure of theirs, your passion will become a kind of external conscience to them, and for your sake they will resist where for their own they might have yielded. The great mass of men have little energy or momentum, and they are gladly swept along in the train of a more vehement nature.

"Life works in you," says Paul, telling of the victory which waits for sincerity when it is on fire. "Whatever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus," as if the Lord Himself were doing the deeds, and as if, also, the deeds were done to Him; that might be written as a motto for every sort of social and Christian work. Let it be done not in mere good fellowship, but with

something of the faith and the fervour which Jesus brought to the world. If this wonderful faith of Jesus Christ, and the view of life and of men which He gives, laid hold of us more entirely, it would colour all our activities. We should love our friends in Him and our enemies because of Him; we should care for the weak in His way, and find a pleasure in supporting them. And not always, but sometimes, if we so gave ourselves to the task, we should, like Paul, see life working in those whom we serve, new interests, hopes, possibilities appearing in them; and that is surely worth some little effort and some patience.

XIX.

DEAD SOULS.

"Prophesy over these bones, and say unto them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Prophesy unto the wind, and say, Thus saith the Lord God, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."—EZEK. xxxvii. 4, 9.

ONE of the primary questions for a Christian man concerns the view which he takes of any hard or hopeless piece of work. When he acquaints himself with the degradation of a city or of a life, is he to trust his eyes which report to him nothing but features of discouragement? or can his faith supply some deeper and diviner witness as to what is possible? The Old Testament contains two judgments of one historical situation. In the Book of Nehemiah (iv. 2) we read that when Sanballat saw the Hebrews beginning work on the walls of their ruined city, he sneered, "What are these feeble Jews doing? do they expect to work miracles, to revive stones out of these heaps of burnt rubbish?" For to him, you see, nothing was apparent but the unlikelihoods. But another man, looking at exactly the same facts, only with different assumptions, declares,

"Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion, for the time to have pity on her is come; for see, Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and have pity upon her rubbish." He found something worthy of reverence in what moved the other's contempt. Look, says the one, at that handful of creatures, crawling like ants over the rubbish heaps! what faintest chance have they of making a city? Ay, they are few and frail, admits the other, with sorrow in their hearts, but with a kind of desperate courage also, and that is a spectacle which God will not disregard. That is one contrast of this passage, the witness of the eye and the witness of faith.

The situation on which Ezekiel looked out was sombre enough. When Jerusalem was captured, the conquerors carried through a relentless sifting of the nation, and all that was brave, well-born, intelligent within it—the nobles and leaders and craftsmen—were singled out and banished, and only, as the historian allows, "the poorest sort of the people" were left, and they, with a king to match them, went straight for the abyss. The exiles were handled with real political skill, with the deliberate purpose of extinguishing the national life. Well-born lads were attached to the court as eunuchs, and the rest were so scattered as to make anything like a rally impossible, and the mournful conviction, which prevailed, found utterance in a saying quoted by Ezekiel, "Behold our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost, we are clean cut off." And so, feeling that their life

as Israelites was at an end, they turned to seek a new career in the great Empire in which they were submerged. Their patriotic spirit was broken, and an ignoble contentment laid hold upon them, so that they did not desire to be other than they were. How could such men build up a nation? Ezekiel, who was an entirely good man but not a genius, seemed powerless to make an impression, and the question was thrust upon him whether he would believe the witness of his eyes, or the braver witness of his faith.

He tells us how the situation looked—like some ancient battlefield, where the dead had long been dead. There were not even groans of the stricken to suggest that something might still be done, but an unendurable silence. Beast and bird had had their will, and over all the valley floor there was strown the indiscriminate litter of human bones. He wandered round the field, and wherever he turned, death confronted him—death which had already forgotten that life had ever been; and when the outspread desolation had sunk into his spirit, the question rose within him, "Can these bones live?" It is in a world like that, he says, that my ministry is cast, a world of dead souls, unresponsive and unconcerned. All the agitations of hope and faith and patriotic passion have passed away, and there remains this ghastly stillness. I speak, and no look suggests that I am speaking of things real to them; I am silent, and no one asks me to begin again. What am I to do? And the answer given in his vision was that, even if his

fellows seemed clearly past the hope of influence or appeal, he must not for a moment admit that they were. "I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone." That is a testimony which has had abundant confirmation: men are made worth something by treating them as if they were worth something. You must speak to men who are leaving self-respect as if you respected them; you must talk of freedom to those who are growing careless of it, of national glory and restoration to men forgetful and incredulous. Of course, you will meet with frequent rebuffs, and sometimes you will laugh at the witlessness of your enterprise, prophesying to dry bones; only you must go on. And to the praise of Ezekiel it is recorded that he did go on, and much of his thought was given to projects for a reformed temple and worship at a time when, to practical men, it seemed incredible that a temple should ever again be built. The steady force of his conviction began to tell, and dull eyes flashed for a moment. If it was a dream about which he spoke, it was a pleasant dream; if this prospect of resurrection for their race was a fairy tale, yet, like children of a larger growth, they loved to gather in to listen, "And I was to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice, and can play skilfully on an instrument." That is a long way short of spiritual life, and yet it has promise in it, as if bone were coming to its bone. They did not believe,

perhaps, but they cared to hear, and that was something gained.

But still, the fact remained that there was no breath in them. Any quickening of interest was a momentary reflection of light from his eager face, for they had no source of light within themselves. So, after prophesying, to the bones, there remained for him another prophesying, to the wind—"Prophesy unto the wind, and say, Thus saith the Lord God, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied, and the breath came into them, and they stood up on their feet an exceeding great army." In preaching and in all great work for men, we come upon the same transition, from that which we can do to that which we cannot do, when we must lay down the instruments at our command, and seek another. All greater work, I say, requires them both, and I wish in turn to speak of them.

1. Of that which we can do—of this courageous willingness to treat men as if they were fit for something. The temptation of religious people everywhere is that which pressed upon Ezekiel, to recognise the wide extent of insensibility and to acquiesce in it. They mark where their neighbours are, and, having given to each his badge, they let them be; "he that is righteous, let him be righteous still," and he that is worldly let him be worldly still, for characters are formed, and there is little use in fighting against facts. There are whole communities which have

sunk to that, perfectly respectable, but with no faintest impulse of aggression, and where the great powers which transfigure character are unknown. Much of what in Scotland was called Moderatism began by being something else. A minister, with evangelical sympathies, found himself in a parish where swearing and hard drinking abounded; at first he talked in his own dialect, but, in a while, as no one understood, he changed his tone, and through the rest of life he was content to discharge a purely mechanical office, taking men as they were, and not expecting them ever to be different. But alongside of that we have another record, of brave men coming into very ungodly regions, and by sheer courage and directness penetrating the hard crust of habit, and awakening in the unlikeliest people interest, and tenderness, and the deep fountain of tears. If you desire to see a resurrection in your nation, said God to the prophet, the first step is in your own power; speak to your fellows, not as if they were inaccessible, but waiting for the emancipating power of God. "God trusts a man," says Bengel, and by that He makes him man indeed; and we, on our side, by treating him as fit for something, may begin the work of making him fit. Tolstoy describes the effect in a frightful lodging-house in Moscow of something which he had said, without knowing that he was overheard. Over the top of a partition in the room, one woman's head and then another appeared, looking at him with strained attention. "I had not expected that a casual

word would produce such an impression. It was like the field of battle seen by Ezekiel on which the bones began to move. I had uttered a chance word of love and pity, and it produced upon these women such an effect that it seemed as if they had been waiting for it, to cease to be corpses and to become alive again." Nothing is gained by underestimating the difficulty; and yet I think that every one who has had experience in working for others must have seen effects in individuals like that which Tolstoy describes, when they found themselves in some way accepted by the good, and spoken to as if, after all their waste of life, they still might make something of it. They may be far from what they ought to be, but it is an unforgettable lesson to see such movements in what seemed a hopeless life.

Frankly I would say that this sort of desperate obedience, what the Apostle calls "believing in hope against hope," is one of the elementary virtues of a Christian man. He must not look at the probabilities, but at doing his duty; and he must not take counsel with his own dim-seeing eyes, but with the word of God, which conceives of every man as lying still within the sweep of the divine purpose and the divine influence.

2. But now let me speak of what we cannot do. No man, whatever his rush and flame of nature, can give Christ to his fellows; at best he can so speak as to persuade them to seek Christ for themselves. And the impediments at this point, where our efforts break down, are extraordinarily baffling.

A man brings himself into every conversation, he brings himself to hear every sermon, and it is partly that self which makes success so difficult. You have your tastes, and training, and build, and prejudice, and I have mine; our natures are not tuned to the same pitch, and thus it seems impossible that we should heartily harmonise. Even when you are interested, you are not convinced. You are able still to hold the object at arm's length, not suffering it to come into your life, whilst to me it has become the most intimate and moving conviction of my soul. But then it is you, and it is I—two different natures. How can that gulf be crossed? Sometimes it looks as if a man were going to be drawn right over into the kingdom; his interest grows and deepens—and then he turns away. "There is no breath in him," and yet the most careful observer cannot point to any reason for the failure. In conversion one meets with instances of a sunny and beautiful ease. "As I reached the end of the sentence," says Augustine, "the light of peace seemed to be shed upon my heart, and every shadow of doubt melted away." But without any warning, you run in other cases on obstacles irremovable, which almost justify Pascal's terrible saying, "You will understand nothing of the works of God, if you do not start with this, that He has made some blind and some to see." "The wind bloweth where it listeth," said Jesus.

But is that the final word? It is good for men to feel their limitations, and to realise that this business of

transforming a life passes human wit and force; that drives them back on God. But is it true that God makes men blind? Is it against His will that they should see? And does His Spirit come on men, desultory and inconstant, like the wandering breeze? Jesus bade us do good to all, "despairing of no man"; can it be that He Himself despairs? He told His friends that whoever had seen Him had seen the Father, for in Him they might see what God is like; and throughout His life, from first to last, there appears an unchanging patience of hope. He described His own temper under the image of a gardener who cannot bear to see a tree cut down, and who begs, as for himself, for one year more, that he may labour more, and use more skill, and keep the joy of hoping on. That means, I think, that there is never a complete silence in the soul. God's Spirit is like the sea, beating up against the shores of every human life, besetting, invading at the slenderest invitation, and then transforming. And thus the business of preaching is not to call on men to wait for exceptional outburstings of the Spirit of God, but even now to stand aside and give God His way, as He seeks to give and to do for you.

> "I deem that there are powers,
> Which of themselves our minds impress,
> And we can feed this mind of ours
> In a wise passiveness."

"A wise passiveness," that is faith; to draw back the obstructions of our pride and independence, to be

content that He should be the doer and you the receiver, that is what God desires, and this miracle of divine renovation waits on the consent of our human will. In our own land we have had experience of spiritual movements of the most overawing and masterful kind, when God actually seemed to take matters into His own hand, and all the individual delays and reluctance of men were violently swept away. Some of us would gladly see such experiences renewed, and, like Ezekiel, they cry, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain." But it is of far greater moment to consider what the return of this day of Pentecost suggests, that the coming of God's Spirit is not intended to be spasmodic and occasional; we believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life; and we rejoice in this, that He has come.

But what of the people who honestly mean well towards God, but who have never known His power? For them, I suspect, the question remains if their mind is really made up for God. When Fitzgerald wished Carlyle to leave London, he says, "I tried to persuade him to leave the accursed den; and he wished —but—but—perhaps he did not wish on the whole"; and in that mood no extrication is possible. Augustine notes in his *Confessions* how when mind commands body there is obedience at once, the hand moving so promptly that it is hard to distinguish wish from performance. But when mind commands mind there is rebellion. "Whence and why is this anomaly?

It does not will wholly, and therefore it does not command wholly. It is not the full will that commands. . . . This 'will and will not' is no anomaly, but a sickness of the mind, weighed down by evil habit, so that it cannot rise wholly even when it is uplifted by truth." Ah, friends, some of you are like these half-awakened figures of the prophet's dream, with bone and flesh and some surface look of life; you are interested and inclined to believe in truths and powers which are Christian, but you have never given that whole assent which lets God have His way. In you He can do no mighty works; and it is for an ancient reason, because of your unbelief; and the Lord Himself, as He sees you troubled by mean cares and by some instinctive dread of God, and finding nowhere any remedy for care, says from His heart, "Oh that My people would hearken unto Me; for then would their peace be like a river, and their righteousness like the waves of the sea!"

XX.

SEEMING FRUSTRATION.

"Lord, remember for David all that he bore."
—Ps. cxxxii. 1.

"LORD, remember for David all that he bore"; that is a very unusual, and, I think, a very noble commencement. When a community has finished any undertaking, we are prepared for an outburst of self-congratulation. It may be no very great thing, but it is their own; their contrivance and resource have gone into it, and they are pleased to think that it will stand in other days as a monument of their energy. Most people are like children, and love to call the world in to admire what they have built. But what gives distinction to this inaugural poem is that the men who have finished the work drop out of sight, whilst the labours of one who failed are set forward. The first point of interest for this man in the newly-reared temple is not that he and his contemporaries have raised it, but that it is the accomplishing in a new generation of an old design. That magnanimous

recognition of a man who did not succeed suggests to me the stages of a great desire.

First of all, we have to recognise a frequent stage of mere frustration. The world is by no means hospitable to newcomers and their designs. It has rules and traditions of its own, and is in no hurry to have these transformed.

David was a great secular ruler, and in this projected Temple he, no doubt, saw more than a merely religious benefit. Jerusalem had recently been made the capital, and in the interest of his government he wished to make the life of the nation centre there in all possible ways. The local shrines were so many nurseries of the feeling of tribal independence, and to accustom the people to worship in Jerusalem was to make them in a fuller measure citizens of a kingdom. Then his own power was recent, and he was anxious to commend himself to the people, who always love magnificence, by surrounding himself with the pomp of older royalties—fortress, and palace, and temple. It is easy to imagine motives like these, but through them all there ran a real desire for the honour of God. He wished to lift the worship up out of its tainted associations, and to make it clean and high. The poet uses the licence of his craft in making David say, "I will not come into my house or go up on to my bed: I will not give sleep to my eyes nor slumber to my eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob." That is poetic exaggera-

tion; but even in our drier way of speaking, it means that David, vehement in all things, was vehement also in this, gathering treasure, clearing a place, flinging himself upon the obstructions and prejudices which blocked the way. And it came to nothing. The record of that chapter of experience was given by Solomon at the Temple dedication (1 Kings viii. 18)—"The Lord said to David my father, Whereas it was in thy heart to build an house for My name, thou didst well that it was in thy heart." That has been the epitaph of many enthusiasms. Men have kept nothing back, and in the end they have found the obstructions irremovable, and their great desire has remained without fulfilment.

Sometimes we are tempted, because of this, to complain of a cynical element in the government of the world, something that tempts the heart out to encounter a brutal rebuff. A man singularly pure, with the very gifts, as we imagine, that the work requires, is broken on the threshold, whilst other men, incalculably less gifted, pass in and spoil his plan. "All is vanity," says Ecclesiastes, "and a striving after the wind." Think of Keith Falconer, with a kind of genius for Semitic work, labouring through years of study to enter into the heart and thought of the great Arab race; and he gives himself, his means, his enthusiasm, his unique equipment of learning and sympathy, to die at the gates of Arabia. He did not grudge the gift. To him it could be said, "Thou didst well that it was in thy heart"; but

often men, reflecting upon life, are tempted to question if it is well. Is it not wiser in such a world as this to hold one's way amongst measurable things, not looking beyond to-day, nor attempting what is big or far? "What thy *hand* finds to do," says Ecclesiastes; is that not the precept of wisdom? Thy *hand*, not thy imagination or thy ambition? One considerable teacher has bluntly said, "As a rule, men and women are always attempting what is too high for them. To 99 young men out of 100, or perhaps 99,999 out of 100,000, the healthy doctrine is, Do not bother yourselves with what is beyond you: try to lead a clean life, keep yourselves in health above everything, stick to your work, and when your day is done, amuse and refresh yourselves."

"Our earliest duty," he says again, "is to cultivate the habit of not looking round the corner." Well, that is a counsel which would save many people from sore hearts, and it is followed instinctively by a multitude who are content always to take and never to give; but I am persuaded that it is a temptation from the Spirit of denial. It means the end of enthusiasm and faith, it is the condemnation of the life for big and generous ends. Our laziness points that way, and our distrust of anything which lies beyond our sight, and the selfish fear of running upon defeat; but these are scarcely counsellors from whom we should look for wisdom.

What do the great souls teach us? I think that all who have served the world have given themselves

to causes in which a partial satisfaction was the best they could hope for, and they have been content with that. Their lesson to us is that we should learn how vast God's purposes are. A man, with the real temper of an investigator, does not stand out for the solitary glory of establishing some law or principle of his own discovery, for which he may get all the credit. He labours mainly among minutiæ, accumulating details, narrowing the margin of error, and thus making the way plain for others who come after. "Our life," says Luther, speaking of another circle of things, "our life is a beginning and a progress, not a consummation." No man has ever enjoyed a complete success. A right prayer stretches over more than one generation, and to-day there are places cheered with a sweet rain of blessing which comes in recognition of the prayers and efforts and sacrifice of men long dead. Children are blessed to-day for their fathers' sake; teachings, and an example, and restraints which seemed to have gone for nothing, are strangely revivified some other day, so that in this, as in other fields, we are taught that "the seed which thou sowest is not quickened *except it die*." If that is true, it suggests that we stand far too much in fear of seeming ill success. I wonder if any man is really fit for Christ's service,—a service of big causes, who is not willing to fail. The cause does not fail. A generous desire is not an originality, it is of God; and the desire, and the man who cherishes it, and the efforts he makes, and the con-

ditions which surround, are all in God's hand. To-morrow is God's day as much as to-day, and He watches over the defeats of His servants.

2. So far I have spoken of frustration, but it is needful to remember that in God's work there is no such thing as failure. Where David knew frustration, Solomon rejoiced in achievement. The fertile source of error in this matter is that we treat a generation as if it were a finished quantity apart, with beginning and ending of its own, needing to show within itself design, and effort, and result; whereas, of course, a generation is simply an arbitrary section of an unending scroll, all of which is God's. He sends the children instead of the fathers, and He appoints to each his task. Like runners, we carry the fiery cross a stage and pass it to another. It is no man's business to travel all the way, but it is the duty of a loyal man to run his stage, for thus the message comes to its end.

That, of course, is commonplace, but somehow it is never commonplace to our feelings, which, in most of us, remain irrational and untaught to the very end. We are slow to take the comfortable assurance that achievement is on its way, and that if it tarry we may wait for it, as it will surely come. Our feeling says, the time is long, and our hearts begin to wonder if success can ever be attained. And, on the other hand, in sheer petulance of feeling, people resent the good fortune of the man who finishes the work, and they disparage the result. They are jealous because

of his fathers who died with hope unsatisfied. They measure them, one against another,—David with his dream and his great heart, and his noble extravagance of word and vow, compared with this pedestrian virtue of pertinacity, to which achievement in the end is given. That is the supreme of unreason. In every day of consummation, the dead, with unenvious eyes, look down to see their work completed. The thing they saw and longed for, the hope they planted in the world has grown now, and they are glad. There is no talk for them of merit or performance, no carping jealousy, no fretting because the course of events has swerved from the strict line of their expectation. There would be no difficulty in doing work for the world, if there were no jealousy as to who should have the credit of doing it. The work is the thing. This great soul in presence of the achievement of his own age, says, it is not ours. It is David who is crowned, his labour and desire are satisfied. Our coldness could never have won us such success; and it is due to the fervour and magnanimity of a greater age, and to the prayer and the sacrifice of dead men; far more, it is due to the continuous working of the living God, who, in each age, finds instruments for Himself, and sets His purpose forward.

3. One interest of the text lies in the suggestion, which the Psalmist gives, of a third stage in the life of a desire,—something beyond achievement, as if the restless human spirit took the completed work only as a platform from which to launch itself out on a

fresh design. Achievement helps to reveal new levels of desire. The house now stands complete, the monument of our patience, our valour, our liberality; the priests are ready for service, the altars smoke, the devout wait expectant. Shall we say—it is enough? This man answers that the chief point of all is still to gain. Think of the labour, the passion, the heights of faith of these dead men! how greatly our Church has been loved, what hopes have lived in the hearts of men and women, what sacrifices cheerfully borne, what prayers of vehement desire! I look at the thing as it stands, stately and well-ordered, and see much in it that is great. Perhaps it contains all that the fathers, in express words, spoke of, but does it contain all that they meant? When the Covenanters were in hiding in caves, and mosshags, and woodshaws, a dream of the Scottish Church kept them company, —a radiant vision. They were pragmatic, unreasonable, narrow, perhaps, and to have built according to their words would have given a fabric of little loveliness. Ah, but what concerned them most was not the body but the soul of the Church, and the temptation which waits for men in a colder age is of making the body count for everything. David thought of a house for God, and here is the house; but what of the God? In your complacency you make that first which was a mere accessory. Here is a fabric, an organisation, an order, but what of the life?

"Remember for David all that he bore," how he prayed and vowed and strove; remember that, Lord,

and give us what David meant. And the poet embodies his prayer in clearer words when he says, "Arise into Thy rest." Now that the house is complete, I see how near the danger lies of the one thing that matters being forgotten. They had been working through the generations of Exile at a better idea of divine worship, and the new Temple was designed to meet these altered thoughts. It stood correct, unchallengeable, and yet as he recalled that ancient passion of desire, the new house seemed vacant and tenantless. We have been labouring at the body, giving thought to questions of arrangement, and spending strength and heart on these; and in God's service, nothing should be neglected. If He counts the hairs of your head, you need not be ashamed of the most minute attention to what concerns His honour, if only the soul is in it. Arise, O Lord, into this resting-place which we have made.

Here are our plans for serving Thee, here is the house which we have reared, here are the words spoken in Thy name, come, Lord, and fill them with Thyself; and thus the desire of man passes out beyond his best achievement. The good suggests a better. "Solomon built Him an house," says Stephen; but promptly he adds, "howbeit, the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands." No sooner is the house built than it begins to be suspected. Life moves on from form to form: always there is something more for men to learn, to receive, to attempt. "He is able to do exceeding abundantly

above all that we can ask or think." It is a great word, and thus the noble desire has no end, and the man of largest success is most humbly conscious of how very little his work is worth. It is all of God, " who is in all, and through all, and over all."

XXI.

GOD'S GÊRIM.

"We are strangers with Thee, and sojourners, as all our fathers were."—1 Chron. xxix. 15.

IN the law of Israel the stranger takes rank with the widow and the fatherless as under the peculiar protection of God, and therefore to treat him justly was held to be one of the elementary moralities. "Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger," it is said; and again, with a finer grace which brings helpless and mighty together in one phrase, it is written, "Jehovah your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of lords, a great God, and a mighty, and a terrible. He doth stand for the right of the fatherless and widow, and He loveth the stranger."

The class, whose rights were thus defended, was not made up of casual foreigners passing through the land. "The Gêr was one who had left his own kin on account of a feud, or simply to benefit himself, and who had cast himself on the protection of a powerful chief or clan in his new dwelling-place. He lived in the midst of the community, personally free but with no political rights." He was a kind of outlander in the Eastern world, whose position was utterly precarious,

as it depended on the whim or the life of his patron. Jacob was a Gêr in Padan-Aram, and experienced the legal disadvantage of the station; he had come seeking asylum, and thus he had no right to dispute about terms. The Gibeonites became Gêrim in their own city, and were set to menial tasks. David and his men were Gêrim in Ziklag, with no shelter except in the favour of a Philistine king. In a land where the family was ready at all times to pursue the quarrel of its humblest member, the kinless man was the very image of helplessness. By the goodwill of his protector he might be drawn into the life of the clan, but he had no ground of complaint if he were degraded to something little better than a slave.

That is David's image of human life: "we are Gêrim before Thee," cast on Thy protection, with nothing which we can claim as our own, helpless, indeed, unless Thou give us countenance. God's Gêrim, His poor guests, safe in the shadow of His goodwill, and taking every better hour as a token of His kindness:—it is an image which scarcely needs to be justified or even explained.

1. Our company is unlike to any other, if there are not some amongst us in whose heart this saying has become familiar, "we are strangers." Whenever a man's hold on life is loosened, and he grows aware of estrangement from his surroundings, the word recurs. The race of men has been encamped upon the earth for many thousands of years, but it is an encampment, it is not a possession. The earth gives

us nothing, it only lends even the patch of ground on which we settle; and when we move away it makes haste to forget that we were ever there, covering up the scars which our industry has made. It goes its way, with laws and ends of its own, and it does not turn aside to make room for plans of ours. It has its own life. To you and me it seems that when we were born the world suddenly became more interesting and alive, and when we die, it is hard for us to imagine what our world will be like; but the earth itself is majestically unaware of our coming and departure,—yes, and of the coming and departure of the whole human race. We are as little to it as a tourist party are to London; they hurry here and there, full of tireless energy, seeing, appraising, admiring or disparaging everything, and feeling, for the moment, as if all were at their command; but their days run out, and London never knows that they were there. "One generation goeth, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth for ever." Sometimes a feeling of the littleness of our existence breaks in upon us; this life, which matters so enormously to us, seems to matter not at all to anything else. As strangers we come and go, and the world on which we have hoped to leave some lasting mark makes nothing of us.

We have no sure hold on life. Men and women like ourselves fall fast about us, and a hundred accidents and escapes remind us how closely we skirt along the shores of the unseen. There is a

wise indifference to this, which considers that no man will lengthen out his days by thinking much about the end, and which takes life for granted while it lasts. But sometimes we are conscious of a thinness and lack of support in all we lean upon, as if we had come to the verge and limit of created things where the world itself breaks down; and then there is no comfort for us, if, by God's mercy, we cannot catch some glimpse of remoter things, as where beyond the sea "blue mountains raise aloft a signal of a new country, a country of romance and mystery," different from that through which we have travelled on so far.

Even in the midst of crowds we often find ourselves alone, for the men to whom we really speak are few. Communications of a sort we hold with others, but to them our life counts for just as little as it does to the earth itself. Only here and there is one whom we really know, and who knows us; and from these life keeps us much apart, and one by one they drop away, and we search the ranks of men in vain for any friend. "We are strangers," indeed, cast by the waves on an unknown shore, and waiting for the rising tide which will bear us out again to sea. Francis of Assisi wished his brethren even in their dwellings to keep reminders of this open fact, that "all things still might chant the songs of pilgrimage and exile"; but many of us require no such deliberate reminder, for everything they touch seems still to chant these songs.

2. But, says David, lifting us past the mood of

sentimental pathos, we are *God's* Gêrim. It was a relation in which a man's character appeared. Because the stranger was so entirely at his mercy, the harsh and unscrupulous patron would press him to the wall, and one who was merely without imagination, and did not picture to himself the feelings of an alien, would fret his temper at every turn; whilst, on the other hand, a just man would labour always to treat his client as a man. The laws scattered through the Pentateuch about the treatment of strangers are so richly equitable and so full of imaginative sympathy that they might guide us still in our relations with dependants. "Show kindness to the stranger," it is said again and again, "for thou wast a stranger in the land of Egypt." The weariness of their own exile and the contumely which they had suffered from their taskmasters were a preparation for understanding the case of all defenceless folk. "When Dante passed along the streets of Verona," says Heine, with a flash of tormented feeling, "the people whispered after him, 'That man has been in hell, or how could he have pictured its pains?' And it was true; he had lived them, felt them, seen and touched them; he was in hell, in the very city of the lost. He was in exile." Ye know the heart of a stranger, it is said, how bitter it sometimes grows, how sensitive to neglect, how prompt in its reply to any kindness! That is the spirit of the law, and much more of Him from whom that law was given. He sees into the lonely hearts, He disentangles the

intricacies and the unreason of the stranger's feeling, and in that knowledge of His, security is given of how He will treat His poor clients.

But is God as considerate to His Gêrim as He bade the Hebrews be to theirs? Does He, in very fact, deal with them like one who knows the heart of a stranger? At first sight, it must be confessed that this world often looks as if God had gone away. The prophets had to meet the taunt that "God has left the earth"; and Jesus, in His parables, speaks again and again of the master who makes a journey and leaves his servants to themselves. There is a suggestion of haphazard in the way in which things fall out, which presses hard upon the hearts of men, and many of His Gêrim have been tempted to complain, "Doth God know, and is there knowledge with the Most High?" That is a complaint which disappears in presence of a better faith; but unfortunately it has found expression in hymns which encourage people of weak faith to talk ungraciously of God.

"Earth's but a desert drear,"

says one, shutting his eyes to the wealth of experience and enjoyment which life affords. That is the language of an unbelieving pietism, not of true piety. "A desert drear"—and that is said of this marvellous panorama of life, with its unending procession of joys, and hopes, and interests, and affections, and duties! A man may make it a desert, it is true; if he refuse the claims of human kindness, if he stop the movements of

natural gladness and admiration in his heart, if he resent every touch of privation or discipline, he may easily find the earth a desert. But to any wholesome nature and to any simplicity of faith, the provision which God makes for His Gêrim will always seem surprising. As each new day comes, men will admire the wonder of His patience and His bounty. There are experiences and relations in life which already seem to touch perfection, for our minds can imagine nothing deeper or more blessed. There are sights in the world which live on in our memory, and hold the mind when they have passed in an attitude of awe and of gladness. And these are for His Gêrim! And when you come beyond the region of the visible, you, who have no rights, learn how God discovers and imagines rights. He is not content to give to each what he deserves, He continually bestows on men what they have not deserved. If we received only what we have worked for, we should be poor indeed. We scramble for the seats of honour; we plume ourselves on what, after all, is His and not ours; and we give no heed to those who have been cast by Him on our compassion. "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who should stand?" If we got only as we give, and had no forgiveness beyond the measure of our own, how miserable would be our lot! But there is forgiveness with Thee, and not after the manner of men, O God.

3. But to call ourselves strangers to the end, even though it be strangers with God, is too poor a fruit

of experience. We are strangers, because we are on the way to be sons, and the face of the world changes for a man when he discovers that he is not a kinless waif in a foreign land, but a son, with God as his Father. Epictetus speaks of the snare which waits for all men of treating what is good in passing as if it were good for altogether; they settle into habits of pleasure and ease, or of work and ambition, as if these were the end of life. "That is," he says, "as if a man on his journey home were to find a pleasant inn on the road, and, liking it, to stay on always in it. Man, thou hast forgotten thine object! thy journey was not to this but through this. But this inn is attractive! Yes, and so are other inns and fields and meadows, but merely as places of passage. You have as object to get home, and other things are good only as things of passage." That was said of men entangled in pleasure and ambition, and it applies with quite equal force to those who are entangled in the discomforts and disappointments of the world, and who live amongst these experiences as if they were the very atmosphere in which all of life must be spent. God intends some better thing for us than that we should always be oppressed by the sense of the helplessness and exposure of strangers; and our improvement of any year is measured by the degree in which the confident spirit of sonship is replacing the burdened sense of exile. Life is altogether a parable, and at every stage of it God says for our warning, "He that hath ears, let him hear." Like scholars in a class, many people

side by side make one experience together and have the same object-lesson offered to them. But education never equalises pupils, it discovers their enormous differences; and where the dull man says, "You must speak more plainly, or you cannot expect me to understand," the man of brighter wit is already exulting in a truth convincingly revealed. Life is a sacrament; so many receive the crumb of bread, and lightly thank as for a crumb, and go their way; some say, It is a crumb, it mocks my need, and thus they rise from life's table not only hungry but aggrieved; but some, going deeper, find more than the bread, more than a world of tempting beauty and interest and opportunity, they find God, with all His strength and wonder outspread there for their acceptance. Thus escaping from the sense of exile they come to know God as Father, and they look about henceforth without disdain upon the world as a place which is full of the Divine Presence.

That is what the experience of estrangement aims at. "Blessed are they that have home-sickness," it is said, "for they come home"; and until that beatitude is discovered the world will remain for some of us a most bewildering place. Here are such splendours and bounties on every side, scenes of unimagined beauty, treasures of strong affection and patience and courage; here are gifts to eye and heart and mind! It is like one of the Eastern stories, where a lad wanders into an empty palace, and passes on from room to room all glittering with magnificence. He

falls asleep, and wakens to find a table spread beside him. He fills the day with new discoveries, but still he sees no master of the house, only there are ministries surrounding him. "Si talis Natura formata, quid formans?" If the created universe is so amazing, what of the source of it? Many things in life would be inexplicable, if it were only for a day. Such gifts come to the heart, ministries and delights which are clearly extravagant if there is no life beyond. Into this casual existence so strong a tide of divine compassion is flowing, surely it is meant to lift us over the flats and shallows. Are we always to call ourselves strangers, to have our hearts silenced with fear at the sudden shocks of fortune? I think there is no escape from these disquieting thoughts except in the heart's cry, Abba, Father! He has, and I shall not lack. If bareness be His will for me, He is bound to sustain me through it; if fulness, I shall not cease to think of Him who sends it; if life, it is in a world inhabited by God; if death be His will, then He will take me to the region of those who see.

Stranger can never be the final word; My son, He says, and where the Father is and the son, there is companionship enough. Victor Hugo finds an image of the life of man in the bird which sings, although the twig on which it rests is bending; it can afford to sing because it has wings. "I will not fear though the earth be removed," says the Psalmist. Not a stranger but a son, that is the word which tells of the final prosperity of faith.

XXII.

THE ROCK THAT FOLLOWS.

"They drank of a spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."—1 Cor. x. 4.

PAUL daringly lays hold, for his own purposes, of a fragment of legend which he found current amongst the Jews. Working in their own way on the old stories, the Rabbis had elaborated the idea which, on the surface, is almost grotesque, that the rock which Moses struck was round like a beehive, and that it rolled along the desert after the people, stopping where they halted, so that they never needed to feel the pangs of thirst again. Probably, if they had been challenged, they would have admitted that, in literal fact, that was not true; the rock itself did not move. But it was a way of saying what *was* true, that God's care and providence bore them company at every stage, and this they sought to declare to men. We never tell the whole of a story when we record the bare events; always there is something more, something in our feeling which makes it worth the telling. And when that something more finds fitting utterance we call it poetry, which is

so much truer than the dry and literal truth. "A child," says Hazlitt, "is a poet when he first plays at hide and seek"; actually he is crouching behind a sofa, so badly hidden that any one might see him, but in himself he knows something of the joy and excitement and suspense of the whole world of hunted and lurking creatures. "A miser is a poet when he hugs his gold"; actually he is a solitary old man, ill-fed and dirty, in a corner of an empty house. But as he musters in ranks the piles of coin, or counts over again the familiar rows of figures, he feels that all pleasures are at his command,—luxury and flattery and power, they are waiting at his door if he cared to let them in. No man will ever tell the truth by noting barely what is present. And what caught the imagination of these earnest men as they meditated upon the desert march was that the wonder of it was not exhausted in one or two detached incidents called miracles, whilst the rest was commonplace. It was all wonder; every day was a miracle, because God was in every day. Again and again, through that long-drawn-out experience, there came to the people refreshments and reinforcements which spoke of God. Again and again, when the leaders were at their wits' end, it was as if the rock once more were smitten and the water running freely. And thus the essential fact emerged that God does not lead His people out into the wilderness, there to cast them on their own resource. He stays by them, making every day and every experience

a miracle to the heart of somebody. These Rabbis had not, perhaps, the finer knack of poetry, and their imagination of a rock rolling ponderously across the desert is, in the sound of it, ridiculous enough; but they had the poet's heightened sense of the something more in life which really makes life. When they spoke of the rock which followed, they were speaking of that care and providence which are always amazing, as they go with men and keep their hearts alive on weary roads. That is the language of poetry, or, if you prefer it so, it is the language of faith, for faith also dwells not on the bare and obvious details of an experience, but on that which is behind them, and is the meaning and the glory of them.

1. Of the view which faith takes of the life of a man. This, in a word, is that miracle is never far from it, and that, however hard and irksome life may be, there are springs of divine consolation lying close at hand. The quality, which gave any miracle worth to the heart, was not the mere astonishment of it, certainly it was not the sense that this was a breach of natural law; it was that here a man became aware of the presence of God. The event might be unexampled, or it might be the most ordinary occurrence; but for the man who recognised, it had some power which made him catch his breath, and say—God is in this place! In the story of the desert march there is much that sounds like a fairy tale. In the guidance by fire and cloud, in the rain of bread

from heaven and its withdrawal on the Sabbath, in the law written on stone slabs by the very finger of God, in the earth gaping to swallow up offenders, and a hundred incidents and details like these, we are away from the level of everyday existence, for which there may be many reasons, but one chief reason is that history in Israel was always a kind of preaching. It was written by men who were so eager to see God's part in events that they scarcely cared to insist upon men's part. It may very well be that the marvel was not as plain to every one as to them; but even in commonplace and featureless tracts of experience they rejoiced in a presence more than that of men; there was not a bite of bread or a sup of water in these forty years in which God did not count for more than all the provident calculations of the leaders. It was there because He willed it so, and they touched Him when they enjoyed the gift.

God is at work in all history and in the life of every man. It is He who gives to each his daily bread, He leadeth men by ways they know not. But from most of them His activity is hidden as by thick veils, so that they see only the human part in all that happens, whilst in the Old Testament we have history with the veils removed, history meditated and brooded over until it has given up its secret, and God's part is seen. It would be a great calamity if we consented to regard that older story as a divine exception, floating vaguely in high

heaven, in strong contrast to the laws and possibilities of our life to-day. "These things were written for our *learning*," says Paul, and we cannot learn from what is of a different kind from our own. What is written about Israel corresponds to the view which faith takes of the life of any man to-day; however blank and common that may seem to those who see it from outside, it is a life beset by divine kindness, appealed to and shepherded by God, and some day becoming aware of God. To faith it is clear that every blessing which reaches us, the light of the sun, and the sweet airs, and all that quickens life in men, comes because God means it so. There is nothing insignificant, and if we understood life better we should feel its wonder more; for to watch the movement of events, to see the grace that follows and encompasses men, and offers itself, and continually is rejected—that brings us near to adoration of the miracle of God's patience.

I confess that that is not the view of life which prevails most widely. Men are crushed rather by a sense of the insignificance of their effort. It seems to come to nothing; "Vanity of vanities," as was written long ago, "all is vanity, and a chasing after the wind." Richard Jefferies, in one place, describes the spectacle of the open space before the Royal Exchange in London, where our national energy and effort are seen concentrated. "Here human life appears indifferent to all but itself, stripped of conventional gloss and politeness, yielding only to

get its own way, carried on in a stress of feverish force like that which lifts the tides and sends the clouds onwards." And then he turns to ask as to the outcome of it all: "Will not a result be left which those of a hundred years hence may be the better for? No, not one jot; there will not be any sum, or outcome, or result of this ceaseless labour and movement. It vanishes in the moment that it is done, and in a hundred years nothing will be there, for nothing is there now. There will be no more sum or result than accumulates from the motion of a revolving cowl on a chimney-top." That embodies in eloquent words the feeling under which men are continually crushed, the sense of the emptiness of human life and effort; and the only real alternative is this deep view which faith suggests of life as surrounded and sustained by ministries of the living God.

Faith, if it is a kind of poetry of life, is not, for that reason, untrue to fact. It does not play with painted words which can serve so long as trouble is remote. It acknowledges that there are cruel tracts of time, days and years which are hard to live through. These old historians, in their desire that God should be seen more than all, did not suggest that the way through the desert was annihilated. "The path remained stony and sore to the feet, but it was accompanied to the end by a sweet stream to which men could turn aside." If they had written of a people borne on without labour and

without any straying of desire, it would not have been profitable, for it would not have been true; but they tell of a nation growing irritable and wanton through interminable delays, but watched and disciplined by the patience of God. Faith never makes light of trouble, only it attests that trouble has an altered quality when a man has learned that his Father is in it, and that there is not a hard or bitter fact in life which is not matched by some grace in Him. Men cannot know all; they walk, perforce, in the midst of an encompassing and invading darkness, but constantly they are strengthened to defy the things which they do not know through the comfortable assurance that is given in the things which they do know. Trouble has its full place in the view which faith takes of human life, because it is in trouble that men are oftenest made aware of God. It is when the poor and needy seek water and there is none that they know most of the Rock which follows. Miracle is close to every one of us, miracles of comfort and of healing; and beyond all the gifts of God is the gift of open eyes to recognise the help which lies so near.

2. Of the view which faith takes of the worth of Christ to men. That rock, in Paul's interpretation, was not simply embodied marvel lying close to the common life, it was something more intimate and tender. Paul believed that wherever in history God has followed men, and borne with them, and offered

His refreshment to those who thought nothing of Him, it has been a part of the ministry of Jesus Christ. That is His character, says Paul, near, accessible, miraculous, able to bring refreshment to all men because once He was smitten, but patient of neglect, and offering Himself each day anew to those who have refused Him; that Rock is Christ.

As you see, both water and Rock are spoken of as spiritual, for all Christ's gifts are in character, and if you know Him at all you can anticipate the sort of blessings which will come from Him. You have heard much of the Rock, of the nature and the fulness of the Lord Jesus Christ; but some who have never questioned the truth of what they have heard have also never made experience of the reality of it. They are tired and discouraged often. Life is dull, the way is rough and stony to their feet, friends are dying and leaving them alone, and they wish supremely for something which would grip and hold the heart. And they have never given Christ a chance. "He that drinketh of the water which I shall give him shall never thirst," He said Himself; for He offered to men not a gift which might carry them through to-day, but a gift for all time, a gift which satisfies. But many are slow to take Him at His word.

The suggestion of Paul's borrowed figure is entirely clear. That rolling, travelling rock was nothing less than embodied reviving in a parched land; and

Paul's witness concerning his Lord is that simply to touch Him—to touch Him and not merely to talk about Him—is to *have* refreshment. The New Testament knows nothing of a sombre piety, and the best ages in Church History have known nothing of it. We have had in Scotland far too much of these dark and tormented moods, in which men were oppressed by the sense of their sin more than they were revived by the assurance of the grace of God. But, in all seriousness, that is not properly a *Christian* experience at all. Christian men live near to One who was smitten for them, and by whose stripes they are healed. The disciples, in His own day, found in Him their defender when they were challenged because they did not fast, and to-day also the spirits of gloom have no defence from Jesus Christ. Out of the near sense of the redemption there comes not sorrow but song, a daily renewing of hope and gladness and good cheer; and those who have known Him thus can imagine no better thing for their fellows than that they should know Him also, and by an infection of gladness His Kingdom is set forward. It is thus that faith conceives its Lord.

One thing remains to be said. This verse stands in the most earnest and sorrowful connections. Paul is speaking of the opportunities of men who yet made nothing of them. They had their sacraments which might have brought them close to God. They were baptized into Moses, bound in a solemn compact

with him by that tremendous experience at the Red Sea, when, facing the risk of a disaster, they crossed with death sounding menace in their ears. Surely in an hour like that, when they should have been crying to God, they should not have missed the divine. Then through all the desert years, they had from day to day the ministry of God to keep them alive. And they made nothing of it! If the world is as marvellous as we have seen, there can be few things in it more perplexing than the insensibility of men. They walk with God about them, laying all good things to their hand, and they never guess that it is He. "They say to God, Depart from us, and what can the Almighty do for us? and yet He was filling their houses with good things." What of your sacraments? Paul asks. God is no more plainly in them than in these Old Testament experiences, and it is no more impossible to miss Him in them. It is easy to travel on through life, enjoying, learning, achieving much, and missing the things which make life great. Brethren, there is in our negligence a tremendous renewal of the humiliation of Christ; by some of us, with every day, He is crucified afresh. He who is the source of a hundred streams of gladness in the world, offers Himself as the Rock that once was smitten, and men, taking the refreshment, think not of whence it comes. And meanwhile the pathos grows, for these men need Him more and more, not His gifts only but Himself, and by their refusal of Him they make life poor. "I taught Ephraim to walk," says

God; "I took him by the arms, but they knew not that it was I who healed them." In a world rich in divine blessing, there is no blessing greater than the open eyes which can see how rich it is, and how near God comes.

XXIII.

THE CURE OF CARE.

"Having once for all cast your anxious care on Him, since He cares, not anxiously, for you."—1 Pet. v. 7.

A FAMOUS man of letters said of the king whom he served (Louis xi.), "I have seen him and been his servant in the days of his greatest prosperity, but never yet did I see him without uneasiness and care." Is that for kings only, or do king and subject meet at this point? Thackeray says of the world we all live in, "This is Vanity Fair, not a moral place, certainly, and not a merry one though very noisy. A man as he goes about the show will not be oppressed by his own or other people's hilarity. An episode of humour or of kindness touches or amuses him here and there, but the general impression is more melancholy than mirthful." Care would seem, then, to be a common plague, which, late or soon, begins to furrow every face; and most of us know so much of it and so little of its remedy, that it may well seem wasted labour for a man to talk to his fellows of the cure of care. Of course, we all have heard of a cure, but pretty

much as a group of Eskimos, in their black winter, might listen to a traveller telling of the steady sun and the blaze of flowers in tropic lands. The contrast warms the heart, and we wish that such things might be nearer home, but then we turn again to face the facts. Many Scriptures proclaim to men the possibility of release from care, but the proclamation brings no comfort to those who have not yet discovered that God is One who works amazement in the lives of men. Some of you, coming closer to the promise, have actually seen in a friend the great translation, the kindling of a light in his face, the awakening of a power in his life; and in seeing that, you have known that what had been told you was true. But though you acknowledged the reality and envied the blessedness of your friend, you turned home again "dragging your heart along the ground," because that beatitude was for him and not for you. And so the question remains, how to get something to lift and sustain us in a world oppressed with care. It would be good to arouse in any one the confidence that this is possible.

1. So let us look at this carefulness, which, in so many of us, has grown to be a disease. It was not that to start with, it was not fault but duty; and therein lies the power of the temptation, for we are meant to care, and to care intensely. No relation in which a man is placed can at all be satisfied, if he is free from care of some sort.

In our daily work we are enjoined to do with our might what is given to us, to put heart, conscience,

foresight, to put ourselves into it; and if we do less than this, we feel that we are indifferently honest men. Some people find it easy not to worry about details, but if no one had a wakeful conscience as to details, what a tangled and ill-ordered world this would become! They lazily forget as soon as a mistake has been made, and thus they stumble on into the next mistake; but the entirely honest man keeps his blunder with him as a fret and spur until he has cancelled it in the only final way by so mending his methods of work that he will not repeat it. Who would question that the family relation compels us to care? It is, of course, possible to accept that relation in a perfectly selfish and ignoble way, taking the good of it, and bearing none of its load. But just in so far as our hearts are sound, they will be sensitive not only to what touches our own skin, but to all that threatens those whose life is part of ours. You are living not only where you are, but away in another land where your boy is, and you cannot help thinking of the unknown dangers and temptations which may assail him; you feel them lurking like shadows in the corner, threatening you because they concern him. And that is not fault; it is life, it is love, it is motherhood; and the knowledge that you do thus care, and that his disgrace would strike you like a wound, is one of the powers which keep him back from evil. We have other relations within the narrower and wider communities in which our life has grown, but in them all the same assertion holds; and

he who takes his place in Church, or town, or nation, lazily, caring only for what affects himself, and unconcerned by any public danger, is rightly marked for men's contempt. He is not half a man; for a man lives in his community; sharing its burdens, rejoicing in its successes, putting life and thought at its disposal for ends beyond his own advantage. That is how men are made, and it is also how the stiff world is driven forward along ways of progress. For care is one of God's chief disciplines in fashioning the character of men.

And yet this laudable thing grows to be disease. Our Lord, who knew the snares which are laid for our feet, has warned us that the cares of this world choke the word; and many of us would sorrowfully join in that acknowledgment. Where the line was overstepped they cannot tell; but somehow their concern for lawful things, like home and business, has grown upon them to the injury of their deeper life. Care narrows our thoughts, making us think singly and intensely of the immediate concerns of to-day; it blunts our hopes, it blinds our eyes, it troubles all our gladness; and yet the things with which it is concerned may be entirely legitimate objects of our wishing.

Ay, but there is something else which is not only lawful, but duty, and that something else is of so tender and delicate a quality that it is apt to be pushed aside and spoiled by intruders. Mr. Ruskin lays it down as one supreme necessity for an artist that he should "keep himself clear of petty and mean

cares." His prosperity in his delightful business depends upon the intensity and the sincerity of his feeling. He must love the world in which he finds himself, and must cherish an unforced delight in its beauty; and if he lets himself go in the strife for public favour, envy for more successful rivals is waiting for him, and he is tempted to see not with his own eyes, but with the eyes of the crowd by whose favour he is living. When that happens, his feeling for what is outspread before him becomes troubled and impure, and his work loses the finer qualities which only sincerity can give. "Keep yourselves," says Ruskin, "quiet and peaceful, with your eyes open. It does not matter at all what Mr. So and So thinks of your work; but it matters a great deal what that bird is doing up there in its nest, or how that vagabond child at the street corner is managing his game." Depth of feeling is not to be gained on the instant, it is the result of a habit of striving to feel rightly. Ruskin calls it living "in a calm of your own bringing"; and Jude, talking of a nobler art, bids us "keep ourselves in the love of God." Now this exposes the secret of our disease. It is not that the things we care for are wrong things, or that our care in itself is wrong; but there is something else in life so essential that an injury to it is a hurt to life itself. We are here, creatures of little strength or resource, trying honestly to bear our burdens in the world, and at the same time called to maintain a fellowship with the Highest; living where rough and stalwart qualities

avail us, courage, and foresight, and prompt resolve, and at the same time, wishing to develop such ethereal qualities as faith and tenderness and contrition. The task has proved too hard, and it is the finer graces which have suffered. If we could keep the thought of God with us, it would give us strength to meet our cares; but care first intrudes on our devotion, and when it has spoiled that it presses down upon us, and now we have no strength but our own with which to oppose it. No wonder that complaints grow petulant, and greed and appetite unrestrained, and the whole man grows small, and hot, and irritable, and secular. The measuring faculty departs, and we cannot distinguish the small things from the great. The clamorous little things soon drown the voices of the high. For the disease of care is that we forget His care, which would moderate our own and give us strength to carry it.

2. Of His care. Peter, at this point, makes a significant change of word; he has spoken of our "distracting care" (a word in its etymology related to the common verb to divide), which will not suffer us to be a whole man to any one concern, but keeps us anxiously considering and forecasting risks elsewhere. But God's care has nothing of this distraction in it; He cares for each as if there were no other life under His charge, and when you meet Him it is an undivided heart that meets you. "He cares not anxiously for you."

How shall a man speak of the provident care of

God to any company of his fellows? For there are sure to be some of them to whom that care is the one plain lesson of their story, and others to whom it is a tune of words, well-nigh inconceivable. Is it possible that a fact can be at once the plainest and the most incredible to men of equal faculty? Of the Servant of the Lord it is written that "He will not cry nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street"; and God still works in that way, so that some are left with the question if He is working at all. Emerson describes a man rushing out of a political convention, with party zeal inflamed, and being staggered at the door by the impassivity of night. "So hot, my little friend?" The partisan schemes of reform, the abuses which looked gigantic, the demands which seemed imperious and urgent, dwindle into insignificance in presence of the silence and the immensities. It looks as if Nature were not aware of these big things of ours. Emerson thinks that that should sober us once for all, giving us the right measure of great and small; but, instead of cooling our fevers, that rather makes them burn more hotly. We care so passionately because no one else seems to care. We grow anxious about the future of wife and child, or about our schemes of social progress, because they seem to lie so singly upon our shoulders. If we do not care, who will? If we are not busy and vehement, no one else will be; and if we should fall before the end is secured, there is no one to carry the work forward. But that, however natural, is the

temper of those "who know not the Scripture nor the power of God." It was God who gave you that heart sensitive and awake, but, remember, He also has a heart that cares. Our impatience about our schemes of reformation is due to the lack in us of a calming faith in a superintending righteousness, and our fears about those dear to us are due to our lack of assurance that God truly is the Father. Nature will not worthily set us free from care. It may suggest that these things are insignificant, it will not give us the assurance that they are considered, and that good and light and love will prevail. Only faith can help us there. "O Lord," said the prophet on behalf of his servant, "open his eyes! And the Lord opened his eyes, and he saw, and behold, the mountains round about the town were full of the chariots and the horsemen of the Lord." Much of our care is due to a fever of egotism, as if no one were so loving or so righteous as we. And there is no cure of egotism like that which comes with a great sense of God.

The God whom we need to help our care is the Father whom Jesus discovered to men. He Himself grasped at multitudes, but He dealt with individuals, giving Himself to each as if there were no other in the world, and emboldening Thomas and all the host of his successors in the use of singular pronouns, "My Lord, my God," said Thomas; "He gave Himself for me," said Paul. For there was nothing indiscriminate or impersonal in the ways of Jesus, and He taught men that each one of them counts as a separate person with

God. If that is true it carries with it everything. The good news takes the sting out of all that men call evil fortune. "If He spared not His Son, He will surely with Him give us all things freely." That is the God whom Jesus has brought to us, and in whom we may rest without dismay. Anxiety is not an evil, it is a schoolmaster to bring us to God, and it would be a calamity to lose it in any other way than by faith. To be free from care because you have enough to live upon and no troubling connections is a doubtful boon; but to become so strong in heart as to endure and to hope continually in the midst of conditions which are adverse, that is the victory which our God intends for us in this present life.

Peter uses a past tense for his verb and not a present, by which he suggests that this casting of our care upon God ought to be an act of the beginning. Just as there is no half-forgiveness on His side, so there should be no partial offering of trust on our side. An anxious heart is never a holy heart; and he who has not committed himself and his concerns to the grace and power of God, and done it once for all, has still to make the right start. "At the outset," says Paul, "I suffered loss of all things, and to-day, afresh, I count them but as rubbish that I may gain Christ." There is the irreversible act of the beginning, which is renewed with every day and each temptation. Having cast your care on him, you cast it day by day afresh; and so the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keeps both heart and thought in Jesus Christ."

XXIV.

BY WHOM THE CHURCHES SHINE.

"The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in My right hand, and the seven golden lamps."—REV. i. 20.

WRITE the things which thou sawest (that is, in the vision you have had of Jesus), and the things which are (about you in the world of to-day), and the things which shall be hereafter. Set down in a book a picture of the Lord as you have seen Him, and alongside of that set a description of the Church as it is, in its confusions and perils, and its continual escape from these, and then, looking into the future, so far as a man may, show in your book the Church travelling on her way, always in danger, sometimes near disaster, but never finally defeated. Set them side by side, the Christ and the fortunes of the Church of Christ, in order that they may throw light upon each other ; and thus you will write, for the understanding of all men, the mystery of the stars and the lamps.

A mystery which is worth talking about is not a mere riddle, the substituting of one word for another, of lamp for Church. It is a fact in human life which

baffles explanation until the key is discovered, and to all mysteries of the New Testament there is but one key. "Confessedly great," says Paul, "is the mystery of godliness," the secret power which lies behind true piety and accounts for it. Piety is not a mere result of training or of favourable surroundings, it is not due to some peculiarity of natural disposition. Each explanation helps us so far, but then it breaks down; and Paul says, "The mystery of godliness is He Who was manifested in the flesh." That is the typical New Testament mystery, a fact in human life which challenges explanation, and finds it only in the secret ministry of Jesus Christ.

In our text the fact to be accounted for is that the Church has a light. It has had times of obscuration when the light burned low, but always it has flashed out again. There is something in the record as indomitable as nature itself, and it is that tenacity of life which calls for explanation. An embodied falsehood may take an unconscionable time in dying; it may maunder on in an always growing decrepitude, and yet not be quite dead. But here is a light which, time after time, has blazed forth and startled a slumberous world. And the explanation which John offers is that there is One who secretly walks among the lamps to tend them, and who holds the stars, so that they do not fall. Every chapter in the history of revivals and in the story of heart piety is also a chapter in the records of the ministry of Jesus Christ. No man will ever understand "the things which are," unless he keeps in

mind the things which John saw, the lineaments of the glorified Son of God.

1. In the image which he uses, John suggests that the life of a Christian man or Church is twofold; it may be studied and judged on the level of daily conduct, but also, on a higher level, as in the presence of God. Happily it is now needless to say much on the old delusion that "the angels" of the Churches mean their ministers. It is not creditable to the intelligence of Christian people that such a notion should have survived a single reading of the letters themselves, for no minister was ever so entirely one with his congregation in character and attainment as all these seven angels are with their Churches. For every grace, achievement, endurance of the Church the angel is commended as if they all were his; for every fault or backsliding he is reproved as the guilty person. It is never once suggested that he stands apart from the people, is wiser and godlier than they, or less wise or less in earnest. There is no call given to the angel to stir up his gift for their sake, or to the people to prove themselves worthy of a peculiar privilege. Angel and Church, in fact, are nothing else than two aspects of one thing; the "angel of the Church" is the spirit or character of the Church, the Church as God sees it. By living its own life, a Church acquires a peculiarity of its own. The experiences through which it has passed, the kind of ministry it has had, the enterprises it has attempted or refused, make their mark upon it. Some Churches are always young, buoyant, courageous; and

some are terribly old and timorous and inert. And that common life or character, which God sees, is, in John's phrase, the angel of the Church.

When that is clear, the fitness and beauty of John's image are at once apparent. There is a life of the Church open to the inspection of men, a life on earth's level, an example and an influence by which the roads on which men travel may be illumined, and that John speaks of as a lamp. But there is also a life which can only be guessed at in the working day, a life beyond our reach ; and that he calls a star.

One compliment which is paid to the Church of Jesus comes with the demand that Christian men should not merely be like their neighbours. The demand is often presented in the form of a sneer because of shortcomings ; but even this suggests that something is asked for, and that men are contemptuous because they are secretly disappointed. Those who make no profession of religion have a perfectly clear sense of the moral pre-eminence of Jesus, they feel that in those who profess to follow Him there ought to be some real superiority, some touch of unworldliness, some faith in human goodness ; and when they see us as we mostly are, selfish and vain and cowardly, with a quick eye for the winning side, they are not inclined to measure words. A good man, in the great sense of the word, always finds admirers among the unreligious ; they believe in him and champion his good name, for, inwardly, they are grateful to him for keeping alive their faith in better things. Jesus said to His disciples,

"Ye are the lights of the world," in whom perplexed and disheartened men should find guidance. "Ye are the salt of the earth"; your lot is cast in a world in which the forces making for decay and dissolution abound; and if you are merely what every one about you is, without emphasis or distinction of character, you have missed the intention of your calling. It is well for a man that he does not lie or steal, and that he observes the outward practices of religion; but these things do not make him a Christian man. The distinctly Christian note appears rather with such qualities as unworldliness, unselfishness, patience towards men who are stupid and bad, and that curious unity of nature which we call holiness. That was the beauty of the Lord Himself, and whenever it appears in a Church, it begins to shine as a light in the world. And what John means by the mystery of the lamps is that some men have always shined in this way. In periods which seemed to make nobility and purity a miracle, out of conditions the most adverse this extraordinary grace of character has sprung up. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, but made like unto the Son of God—that is the record of many awakenings of character. And when such things are seen, rude and untaught men acknowledge a power beyond their own, even when they do not guess as yet at the secret ministries by which Christ holds the lamps alight.

But "our outwardness is our inwardness." There is a life which Christian men must live, like to a

star, and he who does not know what it is to get high up above care and fear, out of the world of things obscure to the nobler world of certainties, will never greatly help his fellows. "The star floats in heaven, and has no contact with earth except by sending thither its own radiance. Earth-born clouds stop short at an immeasurable distance below its altitude; it is a celestial creature, a recluse by day, a watcher by night. God Almighty, without whom was not anything made that was made, made the stars also." No one can read the Gospels without coming upon that lesson; for Jesus was found sufficient for every call, whether of temptation or of service, because He came down to it, or, should I say—He came out to it? He lived a life towards God so that there was in Him a very splendour of light for the guidance of men. When it is said that every man went to his own home, we read that Jesus went to the Mount of Olives; and it seems to follow as of course, that when others judged conventionally and even basely, His mind shone out for the instruction of all the generations since. Many of us are entirely sound in their intentions. They have a real concern for justice, and abundant human kindness, but they fail in what is towards God. Something they do as of duty in that direction, but their faith and love do not stream up towards Him like a flame. God does not measure as we do, and He is not deceived as men are by the mere gust and vehemence of religious emotion; He desires truth in the inward

parts. And yet I think I speak His mind in saying that it is in the hidden life that the secret of our failure lies.

But we must not think that all the stars are quenched. Out of dead ages, there have come prayers and confessions and hymns which cannot be bettered. In opinion the men who wrote these things were often far astray; but their hearts did know the goal, and when they were not exposing what they counted error, or defending their defective dogmas in the schools, but with God, their heart found its voice, and it rings out unmistakable and true. It is commonly by a sort of accident that we are admitted to these soul secrets; but in all ages, when men have been caught, as it were, off their guard, there have been surprises of the same kind. In some who have never passed for pietists, sober, honest, courteous, Christian gentlemen and little more, you one day catch a glimpse of things which make you ashamed; for you find them moving on levels of feeling and desire which are strange to you, their life really like a star. And that recalls you to this twofold mystery of the lamp and the star.

2. For what is the support of this life? "Write the things which thou hast seen," John seemed to hear, and know that in them is contained the mystery of the stars and the lamps. The life of the Church, both inward and outward, finds its explanation in the strength and patience and magnificence of Jesus Christ. The history of the Church, in its preserva-

tion when vitality was almost extinct, in its startling returns of prosperity so far beyond the resources of the men engaged,—that history is nothing else than a writing large of the nature of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Lord. "He that keepeth Israel does not slumber nor sleep." There is none like God, who, in the night times, is working out His preparations for the day; who, under the mask and seal of winter, is elaborating the new birth of the year, who, in dead times, when hearts are growing hopeless, is preparing things more than men could ask or think. "He that keeps Israel does not slumber."

Both to ourselves and to our Lord we owe a debt of perfect frankness as to the power of the opposing forces. The world is a great moral reality, and it is not easy to preserve a life of faith undimmed, or to keep our standard above our neighbours'. In a society where the mass of men do not pray, it is hard not to grow a little less sure of God. If we do not know that, at least our Lord knew it, and said, "When the Son of Man cometh, will He find any faith in the earth?" Faith is sometimes a heroic thing; and if we are to maintain undiminished our boldness towards God and our goodness in the eyes of men, we need a ministry of help which is supernatural. John gives to his fellows in the common fight this extraordinary portrait of his Lord, which is less a portrait than a confused mass of symbols heaped together; but all of them speak of the eternity and the endlessness and the

priestly diligence of Jesus Christ. It is only a Lord like that, says John, so awful, so infinite, and so kind, who can sustain the ill-secured life of men.

He was very sure, looking at the character and influence of the Churches which he knew best, that there was a force and a vigilance engaged on their behalf beyond that of any office-bearer. It is the Lord, he says, who passes from light to light, and makes it possible for men to maintain even the show of godliness. Our ears are dull, and we do not hear His footsteps. He leaves a treasure in the heart, and we do not know until we find it that He has Himself been with us. We do not think, when a good memory rises, disgusting us with meaner things, that it is He, the Eternal Word of God, who has sent it; but it is so He works, suggesting a forgotten admonition or resolve, or setting in our path a helpful friend, in one way or another appealing to our better nature, and thus making the half defeat a victory. The virtue on which we have sometimes plumed ourselves is thus of His creation, and, as we learn to think more justly of His activities, self-praise becomes increasingly fatuous. "It is not I that live, but Christ who lives and works in me." There are Churches which have done their worst for men. A tradition of moral vulgarity has established itself, or of formalism and exclusion, so that it seems impossible for men to come to any noble intimacy with God. In our superiority we are inclined to mark whole tracts of the Church as dead

and lightless. But Jesus Christ knows better; He keeps devotion alive in unlikely forms and in the most incongruous companionships, showing us thus how hard it is for men to keep themselves out of the love of God. He does not quench the dimly burning wick; where faith is weak He makes such discoveries of Himself that it may grow stronger. In this high life of the soul, where everything is depth and daring and sublimity, there could be nothing for us but despair, were it not for Him who helps our infirmity, who lives to make intercession for us, and who alone has strength to create goodness in the worst and to make the weakest strong.

We owe it, then, to Him to let Him minister thus. Of Himself He said, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister"; and, measuring things as He had found them, He said, "It is a happier thing to give than to receive." Do not deny to Him this better blessedness of those who give. In all your approaches to Him, come with "the taking faith," the faith which is content that He should do everything. We cannot all be saints to impress a community or a generation by our character, we can all be better men and women than we are; and He is with us, in His office, to make our light shine clearly. "Light is *sown* for the upright," it is said, as if, with every year, there should be more light, to the praise of His goodness who has called men to a light that is marvellous, and who maintains them in it.

XXV.

HOW GOD ANSWERS FAITH.

"God is not ashamed of them to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city."—Heb. xi. 16.

OF the men of faith it may be said that they are not unworthy of God; when He calls they rise and go, and thus they make the one fit answer to His appeal. But from the other side it may be also said that He is worthy of them; for as they go they find the reality better than the promise or the hope. They are not unworthy of Him or He of them, these are the two interpretations which our text may bear; and though the second is probably what the writer intended, they are both so noble and so instructive as to be worthy of consideration.

1. They are not unworthy of God, but are men whom He can acknowledge as His own. God is not ashamed of them, it is said, and, in witness of that, we are pointed to the reward which He has prepared. Lift up your eyes from the shadow and confusion of earth, where a good man's portion is so stinted and so ambiguous, and where the worth of faith is often in doubt, and in that home of light, that place of victory

and achievement, you will see the value which God puts on faith.

There is nothing in our nature of which men judge so differently from one another as faith. Kindness, courage, justice—these are never in question; but how many there are, shrewd and not irreligious people, who set the homeliest virtues far up above this! In their judgment of a man, they take account of his fidelity to engagements, his friendliness, his veracity, his philanthropy. It is by such qualities as these that he takes rank in their esteem, and unconsciously they let themselves imagine that for God it must be the same. Our friend, they would say, had, no doubt, a religious life of his own; but, in any case, he had the essentials, for he was an honest, kindly, good-living man. Now that is a judgment in which faith has almost reached the vanishing point. In times of awakened feeling, men have realised all that faith means for God. Paul gave it its place, and showed that forgiveness, and holiness, and all the blessings of the new order are bound up with it. It is the "file-leading grace." But Paul has never held the heart of the Church for long, and whenever it loses fervour it ceases to understand him, and turns to less noble teachers. Luther proclaimed anew that the just shall live, not by his justice, but by faith; and for a season, through the tumult of the Reformation, that blazed before men's eyes like a guiding beacon. But in many Churches, unimpeachably orthodox in their doctrinal profession,

faith itself has no high place either in the preaching of the ministers or in the instinct of the people. When men are deeply stirred, they think of it; but a change of mood brings on a change of mind, and faith falls into obscurity again.

What essentially is this high thing? It is "that which gives substance to things hoped for," so that they can no longer be treated as unsubstantial and remote. It is "that which tests and proves the things unseen," so that the power of them is actually felt in a man's life. In Abraham's mind, if we conceive the situation as it must have been, there arose thoughts of God different from those which prevailed in his nation, and, in a while, the working of the new ideas drove him out, he knew not whither. To keep him where he was were such substantial things as custom, and tribal loyalty, and reverence for authority. Was it likely that every one before him had been wrong? and what reason could he give for his altered thoughts? No one shared them with him, but that did not take from out his heart the persuasion that they were true. What to most men is the least substantial of things—an interior conviction of truth—was powerful enough to separate him from friends, and country, and family tradition, and to lead him on until death as a stranger, he knew not whither. To-day that ancient experience is renewed. A man awakens to some truth in which his neighbours have no interest, but his heart makes answer, and he begins to alter his life in accordance with it. What power or substance is

there in a mere idea, shining remotely like a star? Even if God is such, what is it to you? and how can you prove Him to be such? But faith gives substance to things hoped for. Not only is a man moved by the sight of Christ (for that is common, and many are thrilled with admiration and desire who never come to see His face), through his faith he is actually constrained by Christ. He says to his friends, "You are all against me and cannot understand my mood. You say that Christ's death is an old story, and you have no tears for it to-day. You believe that God will not judge a man harshly who does his best; and as you have eyes and a heart as well as I, you see no reason for such emotion." I know all that. But so far as my feeling and my apprehension are concerned, these things are not remote. It is as if the Crucified had come to me, as once He did to Thomas, and, showing me His wounds, had called me after Him; and I must go. The long centuries contract, the depths of space diminish, and leave me not at a world's distance from Him, but face to face; and I must go. He bids me who has died for me. That is how faith works, giving reality to things which seem most remote. A man, catching sight of some noble imagination of duty, lays it on himself as a burden which must immediately be accepted. His neighbours reason with him, and point to what is customary and practicable. His minister from the pulpit argues that the apostles did not make war on slavery, but were content to endure such abuses until

Christ should come. What has he to set against that? Simply this, that something in him is crying after that far-off radiance, asserting kinship with it. Judging no one else, he feels that for him duty lies that way, and he *must* follow. Like Abraham, he may die before he has reached any goal, but that does not alter his conviction that God means him to start upon the road. Every man of faith has difficulties of that kind to face. Friends question the justice of his instinct; near things assert themselves as the proper objects of his seeking; mists come down and obscure the brightness of his vision. His views make little way, and he does scant justice to the beliefs he holds, for he is distracted and bewildered often. And yet, however weak and perplexed his faith may be, it returns to its object, for he knows Whom he has believed.

Now in speaking thus, I wish you to realise how essentially heroic faith is, for that is our theme. Believing men are of God's kindred, faith belongs to the upper side of our being. A man may be sober, thrifty, punctual, kindly, and yet have a nature without a spark. There are qualities of character which Nietzsche describes as belonging to cows and Englishmen, and in obituary notices these are insisted on sometimes as if they were paramount. But salvation comes not from the earth, not with sobriety, and good-temper, and diligence, estimable as such virtues are. We are solidly planted here amongst the material things, with much to suggest

that nothing else is looked for from us; and when truth or duty beckons from afar, we are tempted to say, "It is far off, it is not for us." It is not easy to believe; so hard is it, that when Jesus one day met with it in perfection, we are told that He marvelled. And when He looked abroad on the hindrances which stand in its way, He said—"When the Son of man comes, shall He find any faith left in the earth?" Faith is a martial virtue, whose business it is to resist the powers of earth. It is the voice of our greatness, and through it there come the heavenly gifts. It is nothing in itself, but it lays hold on God who has all things; and thus forgiveness, and the power by which a better life is lived, and the courage by which men stand alone, and the hidden gifts of the heart of Christ are all granted to faith. It is human nature on tiptoe, reaching after things too high and large; and He whose creation is filled with the working of a spirit of progress, and who rejoices to see His creatures at their best, gives faith the crown. One of the Greek Fathers says nobly, "When the Lord of all power, the Master of angels, the Maker of heaven itself, was asked for His name, leaving others aside He answered, I am the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob." Who are these that He should bear their name? Men who betrayed His cause, and dishonoured His name, and who blundered often; but then, they trusted Him, and there is nothing so dear or admirable in His sight as that. Through almost four thousand years

it has been the will of God to be commended to the hearts of His creatures by the names of men who trusted. Friends, let that sink into your minds; the question on which life turns is not whether you are as good as your neighbours, and cultivate along with them certain homely virtues. It is whether, having heard of the highest things, you have been obedient to the heavenly message, whether, seeing Christ with your heart, you have confessed His authority, and, having recognised the attraction of goodness, you have laid hold upon it for yourself. The other is good, but faith is first; and without faith, it is impossible to please God.

2. And God is not unworthy of them. This seems to be the real intention of the author. His mind is possessed by a feeling of the venture of faith, of how a man risks himself upon it, and goes out where he must be alone unless God should prove a friend. The suggestion of loneliness is at its clearest in the case of Abraham, but each man in turn does that which he can only justify if faith is well founded. Age creeps upon Abraham, stealing strength away, and dimming his sight, and still he has nothing secure. Noah prepares for a flood which will never come if God is as slack in judging as the look of the world suggests; and thus he labours at what is like to be the monument of his own folly. Moses turns his back upon a career, and starts with a mob of runaways on a course which can only have a disgraceful end. Faith is always a venture, and the question is

never distant, what if the venture is not justified? Abraham leaves country and friends behind, what if there is no land awaiting him, no fact answering to the promise, and he must stagger on to his grave a man self-exiled? Moses believes that God has sent him to deliver his nation, but what if there is no law save that of force, and Egypt, as is likely, crushes the insurrection and drives the rebels back to their huts? Men take up the Cross to go after their Lord, they put themselves in peril for His cause; but what if there is no victory in the end, no goal to which He is leading them, no grace to help in time of need? I think they would have ground of complaint against their Maker. We heard a call and we went forth; and Thou, who didst make us thus, hast not sustained us in our going. We called Thee Father, we accepted all that came as from a Father's hand, for we knew our ignorance and trusted that Thou wast teaching us. We have accepted toil, privation, disappointment as the needed discipline of our character, trusting that, through these, Thou wast fitting us for a better life, and there is nothing behind our hope! We have been chasing a rainbow, and now the light is gone, and we are tired and alone. This great writer feels that if that were the end, God would be ashamed to be called their God. You have called Me your God, and have looked to Me to bear you through; and I have not the gifts you need, nor the rest towards which you have been striving. He would be ashamed. But "He is not ashamed, for He *has*

prepared for them a city." The vision of faith is not an unsubstantial splendour, with which God mocks His creatures. It is the far-away image of things which gain as we come nearer to them, and of which the best is yet to be.

He has prepared a city, says this author, a solid order of fact answering to all our trust and hope. A man submits to discipline and delay, walking with God by faith; but if God is true, there is a process of the fruits of discipline corresponding to the discipline itself. Gains in character and in comfort are in His hand to balance all the pains and hindrances. There is nothing wanton in His dealing with men, but every loss or disappointment aims at larger good. When He takes away, it is because He means to give; when He delays, it is because we are not ready; when He disappoints, it is to recall us to the proper ends of life. There is very much to perplex us now, but God will be able at the last to answer us for all we have endured. The discipline and the fruit of discipline hold their way together throughout a man's career; and God, knowing the things in reserve, hidden in His own hand, is not ashamed at the voice of our trust.

It is an impressive thing to watch the life of a man in whom hope and fact have thus kept pace. He has had much to bear of sorrow and cross like his fellows; and he has had his share of love, and gladness, and success. And as he has grown old, believing, there has been a continual enriching of his life out of God's city of satisfactions. Through love of wife and child

his heart has grown big and gentle; through the sight of men's troubles and the soreness of his own, he has learned the grace of helpful sympathy; in frequent disappointment and by experience of men's ingratitude, he has learned to hope soberly and to keep himself in hand. His powers may now be failing, but they have served to bring into his life things which can never fail. The things which perish in the using, the quickness of sense and the strength of muscle, these are departing; but the things which do not perish are preserved. Will God be ashamed to meet such a servant at the last, in whom all things have worked for good?

He is willing to be judged by His people, not in haste and petulance, of course, for it is only patience which has the right to judge God. Our reckless accusations have been shamed and silenced many a time, when we came to see what He intended. Our complaints because of the lack of comfort and of guidance are never of long life. We need to tarry for the Lord's leisure; but already He might challenge a reply from some of us, reminding us of gifts and aids which we have had from Him. Has He not kept His word? Surely, if we have brought sincerity to our religion, we have by this time learned that it is an order of real helps in duty, and guidance in perplexity, and victory over self — not of cloud castles and fair words. And so we move on, if we are trusting God, towards that day when the unsubstantial and the transient shall be done away,

and we shall know as we are known. Blessed are they that keep His commandments, it is said, that they may enter in through the gates into the city! Blessed are they that have home-sickness, for they shall come home! That is the reward of our faith, and it proves how well that faith was founded.

XXVI.

THE END OF TEARS.

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."
—Rev. vii. 17.

"GOD shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," and that is said of Him who first has made tears flow. There are troubles which have as little dignity or consequence as the humours of a petted child, and some of ourselves have come near to crying in a momentary wounding of pride. But the tears which leave their mark belong to what is noble in us, to our life of affection and of aspiration. It is God who draws out our heart in these directions, and when we have laid ourselves open to assault He strikes us there. If we had not learned from Him to dream of high things, we should not have known such heart-breaking disappointments; if He had not made us so much to one another, we could have parted without a pang. It is of His doing; and there is an air of contradiction and inconsistence in the thought that in the very hour in which, by God's act, the colour and brightness of life have disappeared for us, the same God is taking from

our friend every trace of the pain and disappointment of earth. By the same hand the shadow falls here and is lifted yonder. It is good, through this word of promise, to know that He appoints a limit and an end to human grief; but we shall not know the comfort of that promised end of tears unless we remember the part which God has in the tears themselves.

1. Let us reverently consider the kind of world in which He has made us live. There is no place here for exaggeration, and at every step through life we come on gladness and hope and beauty. Spring has its place in the circle of the seasons, and the faces of children and the bursting flowers have still their good assurance. But when we clutch at gladness as a right, or grumble over any privation as if we were ill used, we are forgetting how this world of ours is built. There is no promise given which it does not keep, and nothing is written on its face more plainly than the fact that life is brought to fulness not by continual indulgence, but by the touch of stint and hardship. The master powers in making character have no very smiling aspect, for they are such as work and fight and trial, and without some part in these a man will never come to man's estate. We are made by what in itself we should not choose. Our bodies are strengthened by hard exercise in the open air. The keenest pleasures which life affords are sought by men in mountain-climbing and in hotly contested games; and when there is a call

to certain danger, candidates are never wanting, for life gets zest and quality at such times that quieter days know nothing of. A savage in a tropical climate is scarcely parted from the nature lying about him; his circumstances minister to a contented torpor, in which there is no progress and little personal distinctness. But the races which are worth something have had to measure themselves against nature itself, and life has been called out in them by the strain; and the very sting of pain has given them a sharper sense of their own existence and a new exhilaration. The sentence which called on men to eat their bread in the sweat of their brow has nothing of curse in it, but pleasure and health and progress.

It is the blessing of our own climate that nothing tempts to ease. "I was given in my childhood to understand," says Emerson, "that the British Island, from which my forefathers came, was no lotus garden, no paradise of serene sky, and roses, and music, and merriment all the year round, but a cold, foggy, mournful country, where nothing grew well in the open air but robust men and virtuous women, and these of a wonderful fibre and endurance." That is touched, no doubt, with the idealism of a kindly outsider; but it makes a fair shot at the truth, and it might put an end to many of our murmurings about the weather. A sun more genial and more constant, a soil more liberal, conditions kindlier than these fierce scurries of cold rains across our city—

for these we all might wish; but if they have helped to brace our temper, and to make a people patient, managing, undaunted, they may not seem too great a price to pay.

There is no greater master of the resolute common sense of life than Burns, and you remember how he says of this:

> "And even should misfortunes come—
> I, here wha sit, hae met wi' some,
> An's thankfu' for them yet.
> They gie the wit of age to youth,
> They let us ken oursel';
> They mak' us see the naked truth,
> The real guid and ill.
> Though losses and crosses
> Be lessons right severe,
> There's wit there, ye'll get there,
> Ye'll find nae ither where."

That is the saying of a wise man. We cannot have lived for any time in the world without being aware that, lying close about us, is a shadowy realm of trouble, in which our neighbours and ourselves, perhaps, have had to play a part. To men and women whose sky has been without a cloud, there one day comes a summons which they cannot dispute, and they rise and go to take their share of the common discipline. There are exceptions to every rule, but, I think, to the praise of our human nature, we may say that trouble, on the whole, is borne well. Everywhere you turn you come on spectacles of the same kind—women fallen to sudden poverty, who,

with unflagging brightness, adjust themselves to the new conditions; men struck down, and forced to watch the shadow creeping near: creatures whose life is one continual endurance of pain, or a sad remembrance of lights gone out; and nearly all of them are striving to keep a decent face. They try to make their burden press as lightly as may be on those about them, and they welcome a friend's coming with an unfailing smile. That shadowed kingdom is a place of great exploits, and self-control, and patience, and tenderness are learned there. Much of human pain looks meaningless and cruel for the sufferer, and yet we stop our challenge as we see how much it has brought to those who gather round him. There are young creatures we have known almost pitifully wise, grave, sedate, with a whole lifetime of experience and responsibility heaped already upon their shoulders; and after their own urgency of trouble has passed, they retain the beautifullest sympathy with all hurt lives. They go about the world with an ear for things below the ground, hearing always the groaning of the prisoner and of those appointed to death.

That is the kind of world in which God has placed us, where such things are endured and such fruits are gathered, where the best of life is created and advanced by what looks adverse. There are weak hearts which cannot bear to see or to inflict privation, and who take that weakness as of the very character of love. George Macdonald says of one of his

characters, "She's e'en sae pitifu' over the sinner that she winna gie him a chance of growin' better." But God's loving-kindness, which is over all His works, is of a different quality; for He can endure to see His children suffer, and to make them suffer. He certainly will not keep from men the chastisements by which their spirits are restored. In the world which does His will, He has a place for nipping winds, and loneliness, and sore distress. It has been said of Britain that "she sees a little better in a cloudy day"; and we, who live beneath a shadowed sky, must learn not to misjudge God because of any look of hardness in His world. Tears are not abnormal or unkindly, but belong to that making of our life which the love of God secures. "And let those who know Him thus praise the Lord for His goodness!"

2. But now I must speak of the kind of consolation which this world allows, for it is not only at the end that God wipes tears away. Consolations are given of many degrees, though some are so meagre and so pallid as hardly to deserve that name. In human nature there is something of the indomitable power of recovery which is seen in the earth on which we grow; for just as the earth covers up its scars with green, so do men, however sorely wounded, adapt themselves to the changed conditions. There is a healing wrought by time and work, a sobering of grief (at least in its expressions), or, if nothing else, there is a dull

submission to what cannot now be amended; and even in these things our God is already at work. It is of His kindness that other tasks and interests are driven in upon the mind, each calling for its measure of attention. Whether we like it or not, we are forced to travel on to other experiences, and thus we leave something of the bitterness behind.

But there is much more than that; and one discovery which many of us make is that, though grief becomes less poignant, there is no forgetfulness. It might almost be said that it is after the great parting that we begin to find our friends, when the mere accidents and trivialities of existence, which half concealed them from us, drop away, and they come out in the measure of the enduring worth which they had for our hearts. We no longer are fretted by small tricks of manner and of speech; we are no longer deceived by selfishness, which sometimes made our interests clash with theirs; the heart gets its word at last, and it tells of what they were, of their essential goodness, wisdom, affection. There is a veil on every friendship, through which we see each other dimly; but now that veil grows thinner, and we see them as they really were and are. Their story, as we survey it, gathers up into a true completeness. They have lived their life, and have well deserved the grave they have come to at last.

It is sad to see how many people learn nothing from their grief. They are not deeper, or stronger, or kinder

for it; their nature has been stiffened, as if they had been stricken with an enduring drought of heart. Some brightness has gone from their faces, but that is all, and thus a chance is lost. For the real consolation comes with the gathering of the fruits of character and the knowledge of the love of God. A man can never be devoid of comfort who keeps the treasure of an old affection, and has added to it some fruit from his bereavement. He does not forget; but as his heart grows bigger, the burden which was like to crush him is borne more easily. New reaches of life lie open for him, helps he never asked for, virtues and graces he never understood. When the Hebrew poet sings, "The Lord hath chastened me sore, but He hath not given me over unto death," he adds at once, "open unto me the gates of righteousness, I will enter into them, and I will give thanks unto the Lord"; for there are doors which will be shut until we come at them in this way.

But what I would specially urge is that our consolations, of every degree, are of God, and, as Matthew Henry says, "they would not have been without their tears, when He comes to wipe them away." That is the amazement of our consolations. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee," He has said. But if that be true, we must consider how our long-continuing grief is opposed to the goodwill of God. He is light and life and hope; and to travel on through years without brightness or unselfish thought is to receive

His gifts in vain, and to frustrate His purpose in our discipline.

3. But there remains a final consolation. In the Epistle to the Hebrews the writer ranges from the Creation on to Joshua, and to David, and then to his own day, in search of any rest which satisfied the word of Scripture, and finally he concludes that there must be a rest remaining. When labour has brought into life all that it can, then rest is appointed; when tears and what they stand for have paid their tribute to the character, they are wiped away. That will be God's declaration in an act that life has come to its meaning, and that his child, slow, froward, inconstant, has learned the lesson of experience. By what bitter pains that work has been set forward in some of us! how grudgingly we have learned of God! what reserves we have kept and still are keeping from Him! what tracts of life in which His rule is not acknowledged! "When we endure chastening, God dealeth with us as with sons"; but one day that will be at an end, and God be seen as Father free from any veil, and the spirit of the Son be made perfect in us. Life is not a struggle without progress to the end—hoping, planning, attempting, desiring. To these there must one day be added also attaining; and beyond all strain of words there is comfort in the assurance of our text that "God will wipe tears from off all faces." A hush falls on the human chronicle at that word; "Elsewhere we find rapture, but here contentment; elsewhere an overflow, but here enough." This loud life of men,

with strong crying in it and the sound of hostile voices threatening hurt—it has its end in the quietness of those who have attained.

In the light of that, the hour of death for a good man must be above all tremendous. "Life is over," says Faber, "how short it all has been! Death is done with, and how easy was its passing sharpness! How little the trials look, how puny the sorrows, how childish the afflictions! Darkness has melted from before him; weakness has fallen off from him; time, that cramped him so, has vanished. There is no ignorance, he sees the Eternal. There he is on the threshold of it all, the same soul that an hour ago was sobbing in pain; and it can never be forfeited, imperfection cannot breathe upon it. He is crowned king and for ever." "There remaineth a rest for the people of God."

It is to that a man is drawing near who has profited by the troubles of his life. More and more he belongs, not to the unhappiness of the past, but to the happiness of the future; in diligence, in purity, in gentleness he is labouring to make a to-morrow for his fellows, and a to-morrow worth having. And for himself hopes, that were out of reach, draw near, and light is shining in his face; each promise grows more credible to him. He has fewer tears to shed and more love to give; and thus well-nigh complete, a man taught and steadied by all he has gone through, he comes to meet his Lord.

I think that is an enviable life, and one not hard to

understand, and reverently we should receive its lesson. It is good for us who have our share of trouble to think how God measures and sets a limit to it all, and how, in the end, He will be justified by His creatures, as they see to what He has brought them along unkindly ways.

XXVII.

PARADISE REGAINED.

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."—Rev. ii. 7.

HERE is a text which might stand our scrutiny in every word, and very specially in that word *give*; for he who overcomes might seem to have earned something, and the reward be his by right. But in the kingdom of God there is no thought of meriting. All faithfulness in duty has its reward, and many Scriptures declare that the reward is in some way proportioned to the work, so that a man may actually reap the thing which he has sown. And yet I do not think that any man who has known God has ever dared to think of Him as in his debt. At every stage of life such a man is apt to be impressed by his own extraordinary mercies; the element of grace in life, of things better than he has worked for, bulks largely in his view. And when he comes to the end, and the question of the wages due to him comes up for settlement, the thought of self-assertion is far away; for the least of God's rewards

has in it something that passes human expectation. A man might humbly ask only to be within the door, to have a sight, however distant, of that Face; but to be within the door contains the whole—"a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And those to whom that blessedness is given take it not as the deserved return for their poor services on earth, but as one last miracle of the grace of God, who gives men what they never could have earned; and they take it from the hands of Him who overcame the sharpness of death and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. For it is Christ who says I will give, Jesus Christ risen and enthroned, who has ascended on high, and has received gifts for men. By His work and victory He brought within our reach a hundred things after which we might have longed in vain. That is a large theme, but we may be content with what our text suggests. For the promise declares that from Christ men receive the right to come back to Eden—the lost blessedness of long ago, and, beyond that, the right to eat of the tree which was denied to Adam. That is to say, it speaks,

First, of the restoration, through Jesus, of what has been lost;

Second, of the giving by Jesus of something which the past never had.

1. When we read of "the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God," the words take us back to Eden and earth's sunrise. It is touching to see, in

the later Jewish literature, how conscious men were of that shut door, which Adam had closed against himself and his posterity; and in their books a favourite image of the goodness of the end was that then the prohibition should be withdrawn, and men come back to what they had lost. In the book of Esdras we read, "For you is Paradise opened and the tree of life planted"; and in Enoch, "No mortal is permitted to touch this tree of delicious fragrance till the Great Day of Judgment; but then it will be given to the righteous and the humble." In this book of Revelation the image comes again and again, "Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have right to the tree of life." And again, "If any man take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part in the tree of life." It had become a symbol of all that men had lost in their existence, which only God could restore. It was a symbol of great depth of meaning; for when they talked of the hope of Eden they confessed that what they lamented daily was not a fresh disaster or exclusion, but an old one, running back to Adam and the beginning. It conveyed an awful sense of the linkedness of history. A generation does not stand by itself, and thrive or suffer by its own performances. A man is not a detached unit; he is a link in a chain, drawn this way and that by powers that lie far off; his moral well-being may be affected by acts and decisions that were taken beyond the memory of man. In the

middle period of Judah's history it seemed as if that thought had been driven to an extreme which deadened conscience. The Hebrew of Jeremiah's day was clear that all he suffered was for the fault of generations before him. And Jeremiah and his pupil Ezekiel laboured to make clear the other thought that men are units, and that each has to deal with God for himself. You will find that needful doctrine pressed with all the vehemence of protesters in these two prophetic books. But when they have said their say they have not dislodged the steadfast fact that the race of man is an organic unity; and the life of every new generation is shadowed by an old disaster. The world from of old has been knocking at shut doors, at doors that were shut against men ages back, stretching out hands in vain desire, lamenting a good that might have been. There is scarcely in Scripture a word with more in it of the ineffectualness of human life than that in Heb. x. 11: "Every priest standeth day by day ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices which can never take away sins." There we see the sense of exclusion, the desire and effort to get past it, and the absolute lack of result. Eden is gone: there is no undoing by good intentions a mischief which is as old as the life of man. That is the one side; but when John wrote this promise of his Master, he meant that the old exclusion had been broken down by Christ, and that man might freely now come back to the lost relations of the garden, to the friendship of God, and

the sight of His face, and the confidence of children with a Father.

I think we may boldly widen out the reference; for men, who have little thought of the sin of Adam, have yet a haunting sorrow because of what they have lost in life. There is a real pathos in the common legend of a golden age coming first which Greeks and Romans cherished, when existence was sweet and fresh and right, and all men lived in peace. They felt that life ought to be better than it was; and since to old men it seemed that their younger days were better than the present, and they had heard their parents speaking fondly of *their* young days, the tradition of the good time passed farther and farther back to the unknown first time of which no record remained to break the superstition of its being the best of all. The Jews also thought of a blessed spring-tide of the world. Man's life began in a garden with flowers and streams, and God walked with him there, till by the one disobedience the charm was broken, and Adam must go out to a world with thistles instead of flowers, with labour and sickness and dying. They believed in God enough to believe that Eden was not lost, though no wandering horsemen ever came to encamp in it, or watered their horses in its rivers, or caught sight of the flashing sword of God's angel who kept the way of entrance. They believed that there was a way back, but they tried in vain to find it. That is a parable of the deep life of man, for to every one the past is rich. Things which once made us start and

tingle are strangely sobered—books which seemed like revelations, scenes which had a light upon them more than the sun sheds to-day, friends who made talk a high communion. Some are gone, and some, which is more perplexing, remain, because their quality and charm are gone. Part of the secret, as we know, lies in ourselves, for we have lost the edge and keenness of nature, the frank delight, the prompt belief in men's intentions. As we go on it seems as if the better part of everything eluded us. At every stage in life a man sees avenues opening out from it with promise of fulness and comfort and service; but life turns into narrower ways, and most of the dream remains a dream. Just as a painter sees far lovelier things in the world than he can ever get on to his canvas, and a musician, try as he will, can never satisfy the dreams of harmony which have haunted his soul; just as a man touched with cordial pity finds none but the most helpless words to speak his feelings, —so our best thoughts remain unembodied, and we are carried away from them by the moving years, and they never come to anything. I think if we could gather back about ourselves the joys, and interests, and hopes, and kindnesses which have had a place in our own mind, we should not wish to change our life for Eden itself. But then, like Eden, they are dispersed and out of reach, and to-day, in comparison, seems grey and vacant. It is a world where new things grow old with confounding rapidity, and where nothing seems to grow young.

But are they lost? Our text, at least, declares that there is some power in Jesus Christ to give lost things back again; and those who know His work must have seen startling resurrections of old things—purity returning to those whose life had been sullied, energy to men who had idled and wasted their time, hope returning to some who had sinned their chances all away. "I will give you back years that the moth hath eaten," says God. Have you seen anything like that? A man starting on a new course in mid-life, feeling that he has huge arrears against him, but starting with so clear a purpose that he overtakes in service men who never strayed for an hour. There are men who came near to God when they were young; high things had value for them then, and a life of faith seemed not impossible. But that passed like many other phases, and they are strangely indifferent now, men on whom all efforts seem to be wasted. But one day there comes a kindlier air, and the old ice melts, and seeds which have lain hidden in the frozen earth begin to sprout. All is not lost; and Christ holds the secret of how to give it back to men. I think these "earthly things," as He once called them, these things upon our level, may quicken hope in us that the process will go farther, and heaven itself be found at last a treasure-house of things fallen from our view, but gathered up and kept by God. Eden is not lost, it is with God, and through the grace of God we may see what life took from us—the wishes too great, the hopes too fair, the knowledge

too wonderful. A bad man shudders at the thought of being shut up with his own hatred, and falsehood, and uncleanness. "Son, remember," says Abraham in Christ's parable; remember, for the evil lives on somehow. And do you think the unexpressed love, the prayers, the thoughts and efforts after good which came to nothing are lost? I believe that the gifts of God are without repentance, and to-day He bids us cease from looking back and longing for what has gone. "They say our words once out of our lips go travelling *in omne ævum*, reverberating for ever and ever," says Thackeray; "and if our words, why not our thoughts? If the has been, why not the might have been?" After all it is a heathen fancy that the golden age is behind; it is the thought of those who erred, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God; and you and I should learn from Jesus Christ to trust Him to do better for us than the best the past has seen.

2. But in Christ risen from the dead we have, says John, the assurance of things which the past never had. The tree of life is promised, which was denied to Adam, in which the Apostle hints at the weakness and limitation of the old dream. That Eden of earth's sunrise had a beauty of its own, yet, fugitive and ill-secured, it was not fit to last; but the things which Christ brought in are not to be withdrawn. If He undid by His long warfare an old disaster, it is for ever; the salvation of Jesus is irreversible. A great rhetorician of the English

Church, Dr. South, in familiar words declaims that "Aristotle was but the rubbish of an Adam, and Athens the rudiments of an Eden." If that were so, it would be enough for men to travel back to where Adam was; and the long history of the world would be a mere circle returning, after such labour and darkness, to the first beginning, which would make of God another Sisyphus, toiling to bring the world up again to the point from which it was so easily dislodged. Happily, the Bible is wiser than most of those who read it, and it certainly never suggests anything like that saying of Dr. South's. Adam was a child-man, a creature in knowledge and in self-restraint entirely undeveloped. Athens and Aristotle were fruits, the world's best achievement on one side, human nature brought to its very height. It is folly to compare their accomplishment with the healthy child-life of Adam, where all was in possibility and nothing done. It may be for that reason that the tree of life was denied. The child's work is not worth preserving; the child's character is good only in a child, and to give it permanence would be to do the little one a lasting wrong. There must be death and change if there is to be growth. The child's soft body must give place silently to the tough, strenuous strength of manhood; its sweet fancies go, its pretty ignorance, that in their stead there may come the ripened wisdom. So there was kindness in the prohibition, "Of the tree of life thou shalt not eat." And we still need to be reminded that it is not

without reason that the tree is fenced; death is in us, and sorrow and change; and there is kindness in their presence. Think of never being better than now, never knowing more, never being forced by the changes of life to loosen our hold on things which cannot satisfy, and thus to tighten our grasp of what is worth retaining. There is a grace in change. The tree of life is not yet for you, says God; but one day you will come to it, when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and the saying shall be brought to pass, Death is swallowed up in victory. Meanwhile, wherever Christ strikes in, it is to lay hold of something that can stand being perpetuated. John, in his first Epistle, speaks of the earliest act of faith as itself a victory: "I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one." That blind, half-instinctive casting of yourself on the side of Christ, that was an eternal thing, on which death and change can have no hold. You will learn more of Christ, but that will only make you surer that what you did in the dimness was well done. Day by day He works in men to give them a character above the reach of death. It is hard to believe that these tentative, ill-secured graces, these virtues which are scarcely more than faults baptized, have any seed of immortality in them. And yet in every venture of faith, in every act of resistance, in every unselfish service there is something set above time, says Jesus, saved out of time and its destructions. And the daily overcoming leads

on to the tree of life, for it goes to the fashioning of a character which shall never die.

3. But whilst it is a gift, we cannot miss the fact that there is a condition, and, indeed, in all God's greater gifts there is a certain condition of congruity. These noble things cannot be passed from hand to hand like sums of money; even Christ can give only to those who are in a condition to receive. "If ye forgive not," He said, "neither will your Father forgive you." Now, as to this condition of overcoming, it tells us how John conceived of the Christian life. To him it was not a matter of education and up-bringing, of dim-eyed, unintelligent custom, treading its sober round like a mill-horse; it was a course of overcoming the world and oneself, and he found its earliest impulse in that great victory of the Cross and the grave. There is no Christian virtue greater than staunchness, and we need it even to overcome our own despondency. If we are to make much of life, we must not dwell upon our failures, however irksome and humbling they may be. A man who overcomes, that is, the right sort of Christian man, is one who, if he falls, does not stay lamenting where he fell. "Would not he be a mere fool," says Molinos, "who, running at tournament with others, and falling in the best of his career, should lie weeping on the ground and afflicting himself with discourses on his falling? Man, they would tell him, lose no time; get up and take the course again, for he that rises quickly

and continues his race is as if he had never fallen. If thou seest thyself fallen once and a thousand times, thou oughtest to make use of the remedy which I have given thee—that is, a loving confidence in the Divine mercy." And Luther says: "Men fight in spirit against the flesh lest they should fulfil the lusts thereof; and though they themselves do fall sometimes into sin, yet are they not discouraged, for they raise up themselves by faith." Ah, friends, that is the hopeful Christian life; to push on beyond our failures, to try again and fight to the end, because of what we have received from Jesus Christ. He has given us the joyful confidence that we have a merciful God. And to this right Christian temper the promise is given of things greater than the past contained. God kept back something even in Eden, as if He would not have men think that He had spent Himself all in one boon. There is for to-morrow, and to-morrow and to-morrow, a vast world of things beyond our apprehension. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." But by the grace of Jesus Christ they are reserved for the man who overcomes.

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